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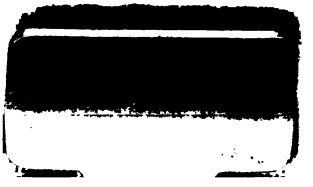

FULGENCIUS.

FULGENCIUS:

With other Poems, Old and New.

BY

B. MONTGOMERIE RANKING,

AUTHOR OF "BJORN AND BERA," "FAIR ROSAMOND," ETC.

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TO MY BROTHERS.

Some of the short pieces in the earlier portion of the volume have, from time to time, appeared in the pages of divers magazines. MESSRS. CASSELL, PETTER, AND GALPIN *request a speciál acknowledgment of the republication of "Angling."*

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
FULGENCIUS	1
THE PEACE OF THE HILLS	45
A LEGEND OF ATHELNEY	81
IN THE DESERT	93
LETHE WATER	111
THE HISTORY OF SUSANNA	123
UNDER THE DARK ARCHES	143
RINALDO TO ARMIDA	146
THE LOVER TO HIS MARTYR-MISTRESS	148
THE TRIUMPH OF LUCIFER	150
THE BURIAL OF ABEL	153
THE DEATH OF ALMACHILD	158
A BALLAD OF KING HEROD'S DAUGHTER	164
A BALLAD OF ARIADNE DESOLATE	170
THE REVENGE OF THE MEN OF ARRAN	174
LADY GRIZEL'S COURAGE	177

PAGE

THE DRINKERS OF MUNSTER 181

THE CYGNET'S STORY 184

THE MIRACLE OF THE CHRISTMAS-THORN . . 188

THE GABRIEL BELL 191

A GREEK GIRL'S HYMN TO HOMER 195

A SONG OF THE FATES 197

VÆ VICTIS 200

NOW AND THEN 203

LIFE'S LIGHTS 205

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY 207

ANGLING 209

TO SOLITUDE 211

POEMS PUBLISHED IN 1865.

ST. DOROTHEA 221

FORSAKEN 228

SONNET 229

TENDER AND TRUE 230

TO THE FAIR INCONSTANT 239

THE SWALLOW'S FAREWELL 240

THE SEASONS OF LIFE 248

LILIAN IN THE FOREST 250

POEMS PUBLISHED (IN PART) BEFORE 1869.

PAGE

THE FIVE STARS 267

AVE MARIA 271

ORPHEUS 274

NARCISSUS 277

A LOST RACE 278

AT THE BACK OF AN OPERA-BOX 280

THE MUSICIAN 284

THE BLESSING OF THE HAZEL TREE . . . 286

A CAGED LARK 291

A NORTHERN SAILOR'S HYMN TO THE HESPERIDES 293

RICHARD IN PRISON 296

THE DEATH OF CYNEWULF 303

UTHER. BOOK I. 311

„ „ II. 344

„ „ III. 379

FULGENCIUS.

FULGENCIUS.

LAMARTIUS the emperor
Held court in Rome in days of yore,
With solace and delight;
Throughout his realm was constant peace,
The fat land yielded its increase
Of corn and wine and oil and fleece,
Nor tempest worked despite;
In hither or in further land
Was no man might his rule withstand,
Nor traitor nor barbarian band
Might marshall them to fight.
Throughout the goodly town of Rome
Rose marble wall and shining dome,
Two hundred churches' golden spires
Told where the chanting of the choirs,
With ring of bells and pious lay,
And holy saws that churchmen say,

Warned from the city elf and fay,
Goblin and mocking sprite.
The gates stood open night and day;
From mead and grove beside the way
Rang lute and voice with roundelay,
With dance and laughter light;
And from the plain beneath the wall
Shrill came the sound of trumpet call,
With crash of spears and tramp of steeds
That told of jousts and knightly deeds,
Where knight and squire and dame and page
In war of steel or wit engage.
And thus it lasted many years,
Till men forgot the name of fears,
And only those remembered war
Who came adventuring from far;
For ever knights adventurous
Were welcome to Lamartius,
That ancient worthy knight.

This emperor he held in hall
Twain whom he loved above the rest,
That were his kin, and therewithal
Next to the throne; and all men guessed

That when the circle of the crown
Should weigh the wrinkled forehead down,
And when the trembling hand should lay
The sceptre down, and seek a stay,
Then should the purple cloak enfold
The limbs of one; and some men told
That meet it were the sacred pall
Were gifted to the seneschal,
Near cousin to the emperor;
And others said that long before,
When Martin's course was done,
His brother, good Lamartius,
Swore that the child Fulgencius,
Who lived to bear his brother's face,
As nearest of his kindred race
Should in his lifetime find his grace,
And none should fill his royal place
But that dead brother's son.

So, through a score of peaceful years,
Fulgencius among his peers
Before his uncle stood;
And daily waxing fair and strong,
A prince in arms and game and song,

All things that to a squire belong,
And eke of gentle mood,
Of all men he such favour won,
That each as on a darling son
Bent on him looks of love, to greet
The tripping of his arching feet
Along the causeway of the street,
And harshest voice perforce grew sweet
In wishing of him good;
The women turned them in their place
To bless his smooth and comely face,
And prayed the Lord to send him grace
That died on Holy Rood.

No less in his great kinsman's eyes
His deeds of noble enterprise,
His gentle speech and goodly guise,
Made this Fulgencius
Most passing pleasant; in the land
He deemed the boy should take his stand,
Beloved and feared, when death or age
To kingship should throw down the gage,
And force him from long trodden stage,

So for forfoughten knight his page
A stronger fight with Time should wage
And keep him scatheless: thus
He loved to hold him still in sight;
And when the banquet was bedight,
No man might bear the royal cup,
Nor brim the wine his lord must sup,
But this child courteous.

That other of the monarch's kin,
The seneschal, hight Ermelin,
A still sad man, and counted wise,
Because with ever-downcast eyes
He went his way, in such a guise
As though he mused on hidden things,
And fingers locked, as one who wrings
His hands a little secretly
To think how youth and brightness flee,
And sorrow tracks them constantly.
And so it was that if debate
Arose of matters small or great
That appertain to pomp and state,
His word must close the same.

Throughout the realm, in thorpe or town,
What man had suit, or lord or clown,
Must make his plaint to Ermelin,
And as he judged must lose or win;
  Thus widely sprang his fame.
Now this man, subtle as the snake,
Might brook in Rome no man for make,
  And sore he grudged to see
How all men loved the gentle child
On whom Lamartius so smiled,
  Till, fierce in jealousy,
He thought himself but ill apaid
What time Fulgencius was stayed
By royal grace and common voice;
Their reverence might him naught rejoice,
But on the boy with evil eye
He looked as once on Mordecai
  Haman that swung on tree.
Quoth he, "When Death, of all men king,
Claims from the emperor globe and ring,
Plucks from his paling brow the crown,
And with his sceptre strikes him down,
When woollen shroud for purple pall
His body clothes, and through the hall

Rings loud and shrill the mourner's cry
Instead of bards and minstrelsy,
Then, stepping from his serving place,
This boy must rule!—Shall I embrace
His knees, and swear him fealty?
Forsooth, he will look sweet on me,
And swear my gentle lord to be.
I who through all these years have toiled
To raise a name, must I be spoiled
Of that I lack my toil to grace
By this fair woman-favoured face,
And do his bidding, overpassed,
And lie down seneschal at last?"
Yet none the less in friendly sort
He spoke of all things, love, and sport,
And arms, and all that youth delights,
Unto the child, and subtly strove
To win into his inmost love;
While, dreaming naught of hate or sleights,
Fulgencius as truest friend
Held Ermelin; and thence the end.

For at the last the traitor's spite
Took shape, and on a certain night,

When that Lamartius addressed
His heavy limbs to pillowed rest,
Then, like a serpent gliding in,
With measured pace came Ermelin,
And stood as one bent down with woe,
Where half was gloom and half was glow;
Where silken folds of Tyrian red
Shut the warm lamp-light from the bed
Whereon the emperor did lie,
All cushioned deep, and pillowed high
With soft spoil of the northern fowl.
Upon the bed-head sat an owl
Cut in brown agate cunning-wise;
And at the watches diamond eyes
He rolled, oped golden beak, and cried,
And flapped his wings on either side.
Upheld within his claws there hung
A silver lamp that pulsed and swung,
With frankincense and spikenard fed,
Above the weary hoary head
That sank among the eider-down;
And by the bedside was the crown,
Whose gems flashed in the traitor's sight,
To steel his heart anew to right.

Thus he began: "My burden fain
I were to hide, yet wouldst thou deign
To grant me secrecy and grace——"
"Speak," said his lord, "for in this place
Is no man saving thee and me;
Speak then thine errand hastily."
"Oh, lord," quoth Ermelin, "thy yoke,
Which long hath curbed the Roman folk,
This graceless people think to break,
And oust thee for his traitorous sake
Whom thou hast nursed, Fulgencius.
For he goes ever saying thus,
That, though none else thy shame detect,
Yet doth foul leprosy infect
Thy sacred body, and he saith
That even by thy very breath,
So foul it is, man taketh death.
And daily grows his pageship prouder,
And daily grows the murmur louder,
That by a leper shame it were
The state were ruled, and that thine heir
Shall straight assume thy crown and state,
Whilst thou without the lazar gate
Shalt crouch with clapper and with dish."

By this, in tremour aguish,
Lamartius all stark upright
Stared on the speaker in affright;
One hand plucked at the bed of down,
The other wandered to the crown,
At last, with white lips stammering,
He said, "Alas, so foul a thing,
Me miserable, then am I!
The child, my darling, would not lie;
How thinkest thou? Look in my face:
Say, Ermelin, is any trace
Of leprosy? Speak me the sooth;
Fear not, though tidings be uncouth;
If lazar, yet am I a man!"
And Ermelin, "Of this vile plan
I came to warn thee, sire; take heed.
Spotless in body as in deed
Art thou, as sweet as any maid;
Wherefore be wary, seek for aid."
Then said Lamartius, "Thine ear
Hath been abused, thy too much fear
For me is mocked by some in jest;
How may I set this doubt at rest,
And right the boy?—Yet if his greed

Hath wronged me thus—but do thy speed
To give me counsel in this strait."
And Ermelin, "When next in state
Thou sittest, and he bears the cup,
Mark thou; for when before thou sup
He to deliver it must kneel,
Then, as thy breath he would not feel,
His fair false face shall turn aside,
Thus shall his leasing be descried."
"Well," quoth the emperor, "that test
Shall prove his faith," and turned to rest;
While Ermelin straight turned about,
And at the portal gat him out;
  And flashing diamond eyes of wrath,
The brown owl clapped its wings, and cried,
And the great curtain pushed aside,
  Cast a red shade across his path.

* * * * *

Hard by the outer palace court
There was a place, where to disport
Himself the child would oft resort
  At early morning time;
It was a garden walled about,
Where he might shut him from the rout

And bustle of the world without;
Therein he walked at prime.
Foursquare it was, and walled with brick,
Whose redness showed through ivy thick,
And only on the southern side
There was a portal, high and wide,
Shut with a cross-barred gate of brass,
Whereby no stranger foot might pass,
Or come into that pleasant place.
Yet might the eye an alley trace,
Close shaven, and a sunny spot
Beyond, a little grassy plot
Wherein there was a dial set,
And therein seven alleys met.
And each green way on either hand
Had trim yew hedges, deftly planned
To shield the path from any ray
Except at fullest point of day;
Yet, threading any of the seven,
You came at length where fullest heaven
Smiled on a stretch of lower sward
That reached the red walls outerward,
And stepping down a little bank,
Saw where beneath there was a tank

Wherein a stream continually
Made pleasant sound, but none might see
Where it flowed forth, or whence it fell;
And round about each little well
Were flowers, each a several kind,
And each stone tank was graved and signed
With its own saying, and each one
Had set therein a royal stone
Of virtue, and an archangel
Blessed the cool waters of each well.

So came false Ermelin at dawn
To where, upon the outer lawn,
Fulgencius with holy lay
Greeted the coming of the day,
Outstretched beside St. Michael's well;
And ever as the waters fell
Their falling tinkled through his rhyme,
For such pure lauds fit matin chime:

"Ave Mary! save thy son,
Other aid than thine is none,
I am thy son, thou art my mother,
Hast thou not borne my Lord and brother?"

And the low-sung strain, unheard on earth,
Rose up, and the saints made holy mirth,
Rose like the flight of the morning bird,
And Mary leaned from heaven and heard.

With that he, lifting up his eyes,
Saw Ermelin in thoughtfulwise
Come pacing overthwart the sward,
And rose to give him good accord,
And took him sweetly by the neck
And kissed, whose throat a rope might deck
More fitly than such loving bands:
Who said, "Fair cousin, love's commands
Have forced me to thy hiding-place;
For why, thou stand'st in evil case.
The emperor, thy lord and mine,
For great despite hath this design,
To thrust thee from his palace gate,
And yet he shameth to relate
What grieveth him—thus I, thy friend,
Must speak it, so thou may'st amend.
Perchance some witch, or evil air
Hath fouled thy body unaware,

But so it is, and each one saith
Thou hast a full ill-savoured breath.
Lamartius from out his cup
Scarce brooketh at thine hand to sup,
And, well-nigh swooning for that stink,
Hath no delight in meat or drink."

"Alas, sir!" said this gentle child,
"Unwittingly am I defiled;
How may I quit me of this shame?
I may not brook my uncle's blame.
Aid now, by Him Who died on tree!"
"Aye," quoth the traitor, "heed thou me
And I shall aid: there is no dread.
Do thou but turn aside thine head
When thou on dais bendest knee,
So shall thy lord not savour thee;
And I shall find some cunning leech,
Whose wisdom for thine ill shall teach
Sure remedy." "So shall it be!"
Answered the boy, "and heartily
I thank thy steadfast faithfulness.
Alack, I soothly may not guess

How I am vexèd, for what sin!"
Whereat the traitor Ermelin,
That nothing of Iscariot's kind
Lacked, but his agony of mind
For evil done, full falsely kissed
His victim, saying, "Had I wist
This would thy soul so sorely grieve,
I scarce had spoken; yet believe
I shun thee not, though all men may!"
Then turned him where the shadows lay,
Leaving the child to weep and pray.

* * * * *

The feast was spread at the eventide;
The king of the world, on dais high,
Toasted his nobles on every side]
That feasted, a goodly company.
The golden lamps their light were pouring
Over the golden beakers' storing,
The woven rushes on the flooring
Crushed under foot with a crisp cool sound,
Where all around the oaken tables
The barons lounged in silks and sables,
And this one listed the minstrel's fables,
And that one jested, and teased his hound.

Was little care of form or state
When the warders had bolted the castle gate,
And the emperor sat with his knights to feast,
Awhile from the burden of rule released;
Like many sons of a mighty sire
They feasted and drank to their heart's desire,
And he, as proud of his comely race,
Sat, as of right, in the chiefest place,
While each bold baron, and each good knight
Feasted and drank to his heart's delight,
Till the chaplain came in his stole of white
To bless the menyie and chant the grace.

* * * * *

The court now resting in this wise,
Fulgencius in mournful guise
Arose, and from the higher board
He raught the cup wherein was poured
The wine his ancient uncle loved;
It was a goblet old and proved,
Full cunningly of crystal wrought,
And thereto with such virtue fraught
If any venom came thereby
Straightway in flinders it must fly;

Great Virgil made it by his skill,
That so there might befall no ill
To Rome's high ruler, yet no sup
Of lower born should file the cup:
And, sooth to say, men said, and laughed
  Therefore no meaner man might taste
The liquor ere his master quaffed,
Because he loved a right deep draught,
  And deemed each drop he missed was waste.

So took the child his mournful stand
Where, heavy head on shaking hand,
Lamartius in agony
Watched him with yearning, bloodshot eye,
From puckered brows that strove to hide
His trouble; then his head aside
Fulgencius, with a little gasp,
Turned, and, as one who spies an asp
Before him springs, so springing up,
Lamartius wrested first his cup
From out the bearer's hand, and spurned
Him from the dais. Overturned
He lay, with wild, bewildered eyes,
Saw the astonied crowd uprise,

Saw where the emperor in wrath
Stood over him, and thundered forth,
"Ah, traitor, prince of villainy!
'Tis truth what all men say of thee!
But now no more am I beguiled
By thy soft speech! Go, seek the wild,
Lest I should slay my brother's child!
Nay, get thee to thine inner room,
And there abide thy rightful doom!"

And sobbing, slowly from the hall
He went, close followed by them all,
And no man saw Lamartius fall,
His wine untasted, on the throne,
To weep and wring his withered hands.
Woe worth the ruler! for he stands
In wrath or misery alone.

* * * * *

Then, like a serpent gliding in,
Came that true-seeming Ermelin,
And bowed him by his victim's throne;
Saying, "How long wilt thou make moan
For him who thus hath fouled thy fame?

Beware, for this were greater shame,
If all thy knights should say of thee,
'Behold, who worketh villainy
He hath more closely in regard
Than all who seek his life to ward
From evil'—and the deed is done!
Sped waters may not backward run;
But yet to thee is vengeance left.
Now hearken; be this land bereft
Of false Fulgencius suddenly,
That no man more his face may see
From this same hour, nor know his doom,
Nor say, 'In such a place his tomb
Is builded;' but from this same night,
Wherein he did thee that despite,
Let him be lost to all men's sight.
So shall men say, 'Lo, God doth guard
The emperor, and will reward
With sudden unknown judgment him
Who seeks the crown's pure light to dim.'
And thereby shall thy power wax.
Nor deem that means of vengeance lacks:
Beyond the pinewood dwells a race,
Uncouth of mien, and swart of face,

That burn the quarry stones for lime,
Slaves to thy fathers from all time,
Their only law the regal will,
Careless for that to save or kill.
Let them be warned this very night
That whoso first at morning light
Shall ask them, 'Have ye yet fulfilled
The thing Lamartius hath willed?'
That varlet must be straightway thrown
Into their kiln, that flesh and bone
May burn to nothing: bid thou then
Fulgencius to seek these men
With morning light—and all is done!
Nor let thy mind on pity run.
Thou need'st must visit him with death,
And fitly he should yield his breath
In some slow lingering agony,
In market place, where all might see,
By quartering steeds, or fire, or wheel;
But thus thou doomest him to feel
Scant sudden pangs, and haply so
Comes swift repentance; and that woe
Of body shall redeem his soul
From endless grief."

"Be that the goal
Lamartius said heavily,
In such a voice as useth he
That slowly speaks in dreams, "My race
Is done. I leave an empty chair.
Thou hast the rule, mine only heir.
God send thee death or greater grace!
For me what cheer?"—and tottering,
An old worn man, and nowise king,
With lagging steps he left the hall,
And the thick shadows like a pall
About him fell; the torches died,
Each flooding a long crimson tide
Across the polished boards, where stood
The traitor on his plot to brood.

So came he forth; a sorry night!
The wind moaned like a mocking sprite,
The little rain drove spitefully,
And ever and again the sky
Opened to let the lightning through,
And somewhere a cock clapped and crew
Ere midnight; but false Ermelin
Went on—so speedeth well his sin.

And lying prone upon the ground,
In bitter tears, his prey he found,
Who clasped the Rood ; then raising him,
And smiling at so strange a whim,
Told him the emperor's desire ;
And to the boy's dim eyes the fire
Leapt up again—" Upon my youth
Mine uncle sure hath taken ruth,"
He said ; " sweet Mother, praise to thee !"
And knelt him down full reverently,
Nor recked how Ermelin stole forth
With darksome smile, as from the north,
Close following on the jagged blue flash,
The thunder burst with one wild crash.

* * * * *

No hint of dawn had flushed the grey,
When from the couch whereon he lay
Fulgencius rose, and took his way
To do his lord's behest ;
And forth he fared with heavy cheer,
Because no matins he might hear,
Nor help of mass might ease his fear,
Nor bless his unknown quest.

But yet he thought, "My steadfast will
Is but mine errand to fulfil,
As bound by right, my lord's behest,
And surely so I should be blest;
For him who walks in duty's path
Sweet Christ in His own keeping hath."
Thereat a little wearily,
But therewithal more cheerily,
Along the pebbled way he passed,
And reached the city gates at last.
The cresset swung full dun and red,
For that faint light the dawning shed
Beneath the portal, and the clang
Of swords from out the guard-room rang,
As back the doors complaining swang
To let him forth, whose single word,
Low breathed in haste and scarcely heard,
Released each bolt. With sleepy eyes
The guards, in stupid, dull surprise,
Saw such a face as one who dies
Unshriven might bear pass through the door,
And blessed themselves, and turned to snore.

Yet now there came some ease of pain

In passing through the level plain;
For all the long green fields of grain
Were bending to the first faint wind,
And all gay weeds of coloured kind,
That hide amongst the waving corn,
Had donned their robes to greet the morn;
The long wave-shadows went and came,
The poppy-heads lit up their flame,
And marigolds took golden hue,
And there were stars of holy blue,
Though yet the sun was all unrisen;
And one brown lark in homely prison
Gave one faint prelude to his hymn.
And, in the twilight calm and dim,
Some meed of quiet chased the grim,
Uncertain, unformed spectre doubt
That vexed the boy: he went about
To spare the flax that lay to dry,
And ever brighter grew the sky
As he passed up through swelling vines,
And topped at length the ridge of pines.

And thereby was a marvel seen;
For where began their sombre screen

There was a little chapel set:
No man once seeing might forget
That little thatched and rustic shrine.
It stood beneath an aged pine,
As simple as that stable old
That erst in Bethlehem did fold
The maiden Mother and her Son;
Yet place more royal was there none,
For still the Son was ever there.
Some half-forgotten saint—whose prayer
I pray, be mine—had reared the shrine
Upon the mountain's first incline,
To bless the much-loved land he fled:
And still the Holy Wine and Bread
Were ever there, and still there rang
At daybreak a small bell, whose clang
Cried, sweetly and imploringly,
To any wanderer passing by
To enter, and find liberty.

And as he reached the open door
The little bell its call gave o'er,
And through the portal came a glow
Of mellow light, where in a row

The tapers shone, and flash of gold
And gem, and wave of coloured fold,
Spoke that small hut a Prince's house,
Where man, in holy, sweet carouse,
His Lord might lip,—Whose loving arms
Unseen should shield him from all harms.
Then, with a sigh of new relief,
"Sure I may go salute my Chief,"
Fulgencius said, "and nothing shent
Mine earthly lord; for, hastier bent,
My feet shall after seek the road,
The so much lighter that this load
Of care be taken from my heart."
And in he went, and knelt apart
A little while, and heard them sing
A certain simple-written thing:

"Ave Mary, Star of the sea,
Loosen our binding and set us free:
Many are bound with many a chain,
Strike their bonds with thy might in twain!
Shield the innocent, right the wrong,
Raise the feeble that bow to the strong,
Guide their steps that stumbling go,

Be justice speedy, and evil slow.
Ave Mary, Heaven's queen,
Keep us ever from grief and teen."

And after came, in order due,
A moment when the kneeler knew
A sudden Presence—and a hush
Fell on the place, that brought the blush
Upsurging to his hidden face;
And, safe from seeing in his place,
The long-pent tears burst forth to free
His heavy heart, and bended knee
Trembled beneath him, as the bell
Began to swing, the earth to tell
That perfect day was now begun
With rising of the perfect Sun.
And, after some short pause, the boy
Knelt, sobbing somewhat, but with joy
At that sweet Brother's kiss, Whose love
Brought peace and healing from above.
Thereafter, seeking his low place,
It was so, in a little space,
That sudden drowsiness there fell
Upon Fulgencius, as a spell

Were cast upon him, and he lay
Prone on the earth where, thanks to pay,
At first himself he sighing cast;
And when the mass was done and past
The old grey priest came by, and smiled
For pity of the weary child,
For so he deemed him, and this word
He said, "The ever-gracious Lord
Thus giveth His beloved sleep.
Behold, his eyes scarce stint to weep,
Yet haply hath he comfort found."
And therewithal upon the ground
He seated him, to bide alone
And watch until this sleep were done,
Whilst all his fellows went their way.
Anon uprose the ruddy day;
Then, with a sigh, as one reposed
After long toil, the eyes unclosed,
And half awake, the wondering child
Looked in a quiet face that smiled
Upon his face, and to his knee
He gat him, blushing, hastily,
To feel the old man's hand that pressed
His locks, the while his day was blessed.

Then forth he fared, no more in fear,
His Brother's hand still seemed so near,
And still so fresh that kiss so dear!

As from the chapel door he went,
There came a breeze, the pines were bent,
  As blessing him or greeting;
His feet were on the leaf-brown ways,
As they grew lighter, and the haze
  From lower lands was fleeting;
As he went down the avenue
Where, all untrained, the pine trees grew
On either side in order due,
The blessèd day began anew.
  Far down across the wood,
The sudden rays struck through the stems,
The dry leaves blazed with sudden gems,
The thick brown layer of last year's leaves
Was burnished like last autumn's sheaves,
And the shadows lay in strong black lines
Athwart the mosses and the pines,
While overhead, full solemnly,
The dark tops, like a canopy,
Shut in the forest temple's glow;

The morning light struck all too low
To show them green and good,
But, black and waving, over all
Their sombre shadow seemed to fall
As over golden shrine a pall,
Or golden locks a hood.
Watching the red glow of each pine,
He thought, "How red the tapers shine,
Straight ranged before our Lady's shrine,
And straight before the Rood!"
When waking thrushes carolled low,
And morning winds began to go
Between the branches to and fro,
Awhile he musing stood
To hear them, for he seemed to hear
Some echo of the voices clear
That in the chapel soothed his fear.
No thought but thought of good
Was in his mind; as round his head
The golden light of day was shed,
And overthwart his shoon of red,
He bowed in awestruck mood,
Bethinking him of holy cup
With nameless vintage brimming up,

And still in heart he seemed to sup
The Everlasting Flood;
And still the thought of that strange Bread
Wherewith his lips were newly fed
Brought to his throat the choking tears;
And still within his heart
Sang on the strain that calmed his fears,
What time beside the plain grey piers
Forlorn he knelt apart

"Ave Mary, Star of the sea,
Loosen our binding and set us free:
Many are bound with many a chain,
Strike their bonds with thy might in twain!
Shield the innocent, right the wrong,
Raise the feeble that bow to the strong.
Ave Mary, Heaven's queen,
Keep us ever from grief and teen."

So fared he on; and when the light
On mead and hill alike was shed,
He came upon a dreary sight,
A plain all scorched and witherèd,
No blade of grass might raise its head;

But underneath the sandy bank
Whereon he stood, the level sank
Into a hollow midst the wood,
Wherein a mighty furnace stood,
Crowned with a crown of waving flame,
Whose hungry flashes went and came
As if they sought for other food.
And though the daylight lit the wood
It might not light that dreary vale,
Nor even the bright sun might pale
The fierceness of that ruddy glow;
Dull wreaths of smoke went to and fro,
And clung about the blackened pit,
While gaunt grim shadows seemed to flit
Beneath; and half he blessed himself
At thought of gnome and forest elf,
Then laughed aloud, "Mine uncle's men
Are something quaint to townsman's ken!"
Then sliding down the sandy bank,
Wherein his hasty feet half sank,
He sought the quarry. Whither come,
The workers stood around him, dumb
And still, and eyeing him askance,
Until he said, with fearless glance,

"Is that which was commanded you
Well done, or is it yet to do?"

Then up and spoke a giant, grimed
With soot and sweat, "Full well-betimed,
Fair boy, is this thy questioning.
Lamartius' command is done,
His word worked out an hour agone;
Whether the deed hath worked his will
Let him be judge—we may not spill!
We worked but by our lessoning.
Methinks I scent a goodly jest.
How, mates! which think ye were the best
For mixing with our quarry stones,
Springald's gristle, or elder bones?"
And therewithal the workers smote
Their hands, and from each leathern throat
Came hollow laughter, that the child
Half shrank to hear the clamour wild,
Much wondering what moved their mirth
Who scarce seemed creatures of this earth.

Then said the child, "His dread command
Who ruleth all this Roman land

I wot ye never might withstand,
That thing were death to do;
But, since to me it was not shown,
I pray you make this secret known,
Now stand we unespied alone.
In nowise shall ye rue
By reason of your trusting me,
I swear by Him that died on tree
To hold me close and true."

And, grinning somewhat sheepishly,
The oldest man made slow reply,
With gesture full uncouth,
"Methinks, fair youth, 'tis clear to see
Our Lady hath great love of thee,
Or else the saints had ruth:
Perchance St. John, that scatheless came
From cauldron's scald and bonfire's flame,
Held thee from scathe, and us from shame;
And well I deem forsooth
We none of us had gotten grace,
If so had been thy pleasant face
Had blackened in yon deadly place.
Hear now the very truth.

" Thus it befell : but yesternight
There spurred me down from yonder height
A messenger in black bedight,
  And hidden were his eyes ;
Scant speech he held, and this its drift,—
What time the sun through misty rift
Should light the pine trees' lowest bole,
He warned us of some living soul
Should come to us in careless glee,
Who, ere the first branch of the tree
Grew red with light, must cease to be,
  In wailing and in cries.
'There comes,' quoth he, 'at rising sun,
  A caitiff, who shall ask,
Is great Lamartius' bidding done ?
  And, hearing that, your task
Is this—by prayers unappeased,
Look that his villain limbs be seized,
And in your kiln he quick be thrown,
Wherein ye use to burn your stone,
That fire may sever flesh from bone ;
  This upon each one's head ! '
With that he gat him from the place
And as the red sun showed his face

Came Ermelin, and that same phrase
He spake us, and is dead."
Fulgencius a little space
Grew faint, and tottered in his place,
Then wrapped his cloak about his face,
Said, "Ave Mary, for thy grace
Hath kept me in this stead!"

And turning him, full thoughtfully
He passed across the level lea;
Beneath the pines he went in thought
How had this fearful thing been wrought?
That he, his uncle, should in ire
Have doomed him to the death of fire!
And much he doubted of the end,
And grieved for Ermelin his friend.
"His friend!" why went his friend to ask
Of finishing of that vile task?
Was friendship only hatred's mask?
With that he reached the palace gate,
And sought the hall in much debate.

So came he to his uncle's seat,
And set him low before his feet,

On bended knee, with folded hands,
And meekly said, "My lord's commands
Are done, so say the forest men;"
At which, within Lamartius' ken
Some grisly phantom seemed in place,
And up he rose with ashen face,
Grasping the throne on either side,
The while his eyes grew blank and wide,
His knuckles white for force of grip,
And thrice his tongue wet either lip
Ere he found speech. "Do they avow
My bidding done? then what art thou
That comest thus to mock my woe?
A spirit, wandering to and fro
For lack of rites, or angel come
With his sweet face to strike me dumb,
And tell my sin! Oh, be content!
A broken heart, a life nigh spent,
Yet all too long for misery
Such as is mine, may guerdon thee.
My bidding done! woe worth the day!"
Then said the boy, "I took my way
At dawn to where the limekiln stands,
But ere I gained it, thy commands

Were done—another in my stead
Had done thine errand, and had sped."
And he " who died? " then like a knell
Upon their ears the tidings fell
Low, in that one word, Ermelin !

" Nay, but mine uncle, for what sin
Couldst thou devise thy brother's son
To such a doom? Thy love was won
Long since, or so I deemed ; I loved
Thee truly, and my faith have proved
By loving service ; and for this,
Because my body proved amiss
Before thee, I must die the death!
For matter of ill-savoured breath
Must all my love be held as naught?
And truly, when my fault was taught
By that dead man, my busy care
I did to mend. Couldst thou not spare
A little pity for my grief? "

Then said the emperor, " In brief,
The dead with this hath charged thee:
Hast thou not falsely slandered me

As leper? do not all men dread
My presence for what thou hast said?"
"Nay!" quoth the boy full gallantly,
And scarce had time to make reply
Before uprose the Roman lords,
And, standing so with swift-drawn swords,
Each kissed his hilt, and swore on high
That no such word of treachery
Came in his ears. A little space
Lamartius gazed into the face
That looked so nobly into his,
Then stooping silently to kiss
The smooth young brow, the boy he led
Up to the throne, and laid his head
In silence on his aged breast,
Saying, "Lie there, and take thy rest,
Poor weary head, thy travail done!
A bitter father, O fair son,
Have I been proved: we both were fooled,
And I, who thought my wit was schooled
In all wise cunning, have been snared
Like any buzzard. Had it fared
Yon traitor, whom may God assoil,
Had wrought thine ill, short years of toil,

And tears, and penance for thy sake,
Had been my lot. But now forsake
Thy low estate, and ever stand
Beside me till thou rule the land,
And I go hence to wait for thee.
Fair son, my son in chivalry,
Well-nigh in blood, thus hast thou learned
What grace by innocence is earned,
And steadfast faith, from heaven's Lord.
Look that thine utter course accord
With this fair outset."
So the feast
Was straight commanded, and released
From danger lived Fulgencius,
And so died he that wronged him. Thus
Did truth o'er treachery prevail
By Mary's might—so ends my tale.

THE PEACE OF THE HILLS.

THE PEACE OF THE HILLS.

(*A hill-side, at nightfall. Enter the* SPIRIT OF THE HILLS.)

THE SPIRIT.

I HAVE watched in my fern-grown cavern
Through glaring day,
Like one who in wayside tavern,
Till evening's grey,
Resteth his worn hot feet from the dusty way;
And, as he lieth and drinketh,
Between the vines
Seeth the earth that blinketh,
And wave that shines
Careless, and sees within fair maidens and cool wines.
I looked, and the light of morning
Grew into noon,
And earth, her anguish scorning,
Sank into swoon
In silence; patient waves abode their mistress moon.

I gazed; the grass grew brittle,
The leaves grew faint,
And the still sea sobbed a little,
Like dying saint [restraint.
Whose racked flesh scarce can bow to his strong soul's
I watched and waited and listened;
An eastern sail
Grew ruddy, the far sea glistened
Like shining mail
Of a new-caught fish, and all the birches began their tale;
And in and among their telling
I heard a voice,
Quiet and slow and dwelling,
That said, "The noise
Is well-nigh done, and the weary land hath choice
Whether to sleep or rise refreshed to mirth;
The great offspring
Of this great sorrowful, laughter-brimming earth
May breathe or sing,
Breathe in sure slumber lapt, or carol to tune the spring.
But one, an earth-child, weary,
Comes ever nigher,
Who flees from custom dreary,
Half wilful sigher

Over the carking woes that make him bolder and shyer.
One whom the world casts off,
Because his lips
Frame them not well to scoff,
And eyelid dips
At sound of the world's wild talking: one who trips
Because the ways of the world
Are hard to tread,
One who hath seen unfurled
Above his head
The banner of God and of Truth, bears it, and wishes him dead!
Out of the glare of the day to night he comes,
Because the day
Only begins the cries, and the laughs, and the hums
Of thoughtless clay,
And he would be alone with spirits, and pause, and pray."
Ceased the voice, and I said, The hills are clear
Of earthly blame,
The clamour of men, their scoffing, come not here,
But still the same
The mountains gaze on the sea, and whisper the mystic Name;

But none with life may spell it, and none may know
How peace and power
Come of the knowing, but ever in breezes' blow,
And bend of flower,
And wave of grass, I sing it, and patter of shower.
Some there be that hear, and a swirl of tears
Tells of their hearing;
Some there be that hear, and the cares and fears
That, life out-wearing,
Fed on their life, fly off, forfoughten, sparing
The last life, for no will, but that the fiends, not daring
The Great Name, cease from tearing.

THE POET.

A little higher—let me gain the peaks;
The birch woods echo with too many sounds,
And silence is my quest, and solitude.
The woods are clouded with light flitting forms
That peer and slip behind the shining trunks,
Like them all silver-girdled, and the moor
Is busy with small folk that leap and laugh
Among the heather, whence their shining eyes
Flame out and spoil their hiding: but above,
The hill-side sloping up towards my heaven

Invites me to its heaven-wrought seats of stone,
And only streams speak; and my own poor name,
Which rings from thicket and from heather-hag,
Shall mock me there no more, because the hills
Have but one name they speak—the nameless Name.

THE SPIRIT.

Oh hither! come hither!
The grasses wither
Beneath in the valleys at kiss of the sun;
But here in the mountain
Undried is the fountain,
And grasses are green where the waters run;
And the whortleberry and juniper
Are matted together with red heather.
Hither! come hither!
All limber and lither,
Shrubs from the lowland, and trees from the hill!
The moorland is wide,
And the moon is your guide,
And stars that shine double from sky and from rill;
Hither, and cool him
With fragrance, and school him
To quiet with singing; tree-spirits, be here at my will!

VOICES OF THE WOODLAND.

We are coming from red rock cliff,
  Coming from fat full glen,
From where the swart fisherman's skiff
  Flits fast by the dwellings of men.
Blossom, and leaf, and bough,
  We are climbing the hill to know
If we can gladden him now
  Who gladdened our souls below.
For the flowers have souls, and the trees
  That speak through colour and form,
And the grasses have souls, and the leas
  With the warmth of their sighing are warm.
Souls—and the mob of the earth
  Have only an inward might
That might have circled its girth,
  But they with their mud-dulled light
Only gathered the dross,
  And said, "We are rich, we have gold;"
Gathered the windfalls gross,
  Saying, "The fruit of the mould
Is sweet;" they measure the span
  Of their own earth-circled days

As the stretch of the reach of man:
They are fat, they are glutted with praise!
But the soul of the singer would rest;
He is of us, the singer is ours,
He is nigh akin to the best,
To the dogs, and the finches, and flowers,
And we talk together with none to hear but the Powers.

THE GRASSES SING.

Ah, surely we can gladden him,
The meadow-grasses, thick and short!
When unbelief would sadden him
To meadow-land he made resort;
There he fell down upon his face,
And we are fruitful, his embrace
Had might; and we are soft, his tears
Fell with so rich a rain. His fears
Have quickened every upland bent,
And moors toss evermore, and moan as though beshent.

THE TREES SING.

It's oh the trees of the forest,
And oh the bush of the bower,

We shelter when hunting is sorest,
We shut out the skies that lower,
We build him a light low sky of our own,
And cushat and nightingale answer his moan.
On couch of moss he may lie and weep
Till hot red eyelids close in sleep,
The sound of his sighs chimes in with the breeze
That broaches the covert and sways the trees;
And the sorrowful sound of his tears is drowned
In ripple of waters eddying round,
For Lethe gushes in every rill
That calls to the finches to take their fill
In the pools, as it hurries by hillocks and crags
Down to the shore where it tends the flags.

THE POET.

Voices, aye, friendly voices! such as greet
Mine ear at eventide: such sounds as float
From out the osier beds what time I glide
Beneath the moon down some long river reach.
But now no calling of me, no soft cry
To win me thither, no complaining tale
Of how the river-bed were bright and cool,
And sweet the kissing on the river-sands.

No mystery of unknown quaint delight
Might win a poet—that I think am I.
Thou God! that madest all this quiet bliss,
These hills, yon sky—Thou God, that madest me!
Am I not Thine own poet? Oh, speak out!
In lightning, or the crash of earth's last end,
So Thou speak to me! All the world is dull!
They will not listen, though I sing my best!
They will not hear me, though I speak Thy truth!
Only Thyself, Thou God, and Thy dumb things
Will listen, and I seek a living face
That will look back into my living face
With honest eyes, and say, "Good singer!" that,
And no more; but I cry, and no man heeds!
Thou strong stone seat, thou art more kind than kin,
Thou dost uphold weak frame, but failing heart,
Leaning on life, is pierced by broken reed!

VOICES FROM BELOW.

Blossom and bunch and berry;
Meadow-sweet down by the sea,
Grapes that grow for the merry,
Haws for the grace of the tree;

Flower and fruit
And healing root,
Who so willing as we?

Who so willing and wild?
Gentle and wilful both.
Bud bids plucking of child,
Up swings bough, it were loth
To court who robs
The bunches of cobs
That finish the nut trees' growth!

OTHER VOICES.

Almond tree and cherry tree,
Filbert and the pear,
Buds for those that merry be,
They who rend the hair
May bind their brows with briony,
But blossom were more fair.

Ruddy bloom to mock the rime
With its red blushing,
White for the waxing time
When fields are flushing,

Catkins in cuckoo-time
For the foot's crushing.

Dove desires the almond boughs,
Blackbird waits the cherry,—
Groweth hoarse with full carouse,—
Squirrel makes him merry,
Chattering, cracking, by his house;
Tomtit in the pery.

THE SPIRIT.

Down, adown!
On the heather brown
Lie thee down and sleep awhile!
Cease thy moans,
The tall grey stones
Shall shield thee, guards withouten guile.
Eye must close
Before the rows
Of tree, and grass, and flower, and fern,
Have topped the hill;
When thou art still,
Thy heart shall hear them wheel and turn.
The ear of thy full memory,

That heareth all I say to thee,
Shall hear their song
That heals thy wrong,
Thine eyes shut close in sleep shall see
The beckoning shapes,
The antic japes
Of all in mead and shaugh that be.
Then sleep and slumber,
For their number
All the hill-side doth encumber,
And thou must sleep before their revelry.

THE POET.

Allfather! lying here beside the rock,
I am too faint to kneel—Thou knowest all!
I cry to Thee! Thy sky and mine is clear,
And all the white way fed from Maiden breast
Invites my prayer: all the herbs are cool,
And I am hot; the stones, the peaks are grey
And silent, listening for Thy coming step;
But I am grey with waiting for the world,
And silent only that they drown my song;
Give me Thy peace, and send me, lying here
Safe on Thy hills, some vision or some rest.

THE SPIRIT.

The night hath wrapped round mead and mountain
The veil that shrouds from earthly view
The woodland dwellers, field and fountain
Grow fresh with dropping of the dew
That cools the hot earth, stills her sorrow,
Yet tells of travail on the morrow,
Bidding the land a strength to borrow
Against the coming of burdens new.

Then I summon you forth, O ye trees of the north,
That toss to the tempest's roaring,
That rock to sleep to the chime of the deep,
And the hiss of the torrents pouring!
At the word of my mouth, O ye groves of the south,
That sleep in the sunlight, hasten!
From wave-lapped strand, and from desert sand,
From reef and from fire-wrought basin!
Come out of the west, where the plains are dressed
With your beauty, ye buds and grasses,
So thick and so sweet that the buffalo's feet
Fall noiseless where he passes;
And the cats that glide through prairie hide,
Unguessed but for your bending,

Like waves of an ocean that knows no motion
But such as the moon is lending;
And chiefs of our feast, O growth of the east,
Rose ripe with many flowers,
So lavish of fruit, hear ye my suit,
Come hither and deck our bowers!
For all men sleep; there is none may weep
Or wake on a night like this,
And the Peace of the Hills his soul that stills
Shall bring to the poet bliss,
Strength for the morrow, and balm for sorrow,
And wider knowledge, I wis!

(*Exit Spirit.*)

VOICES OF THE HILL-SIDE.

We are the watchers of the hill,
'Tis ours to guard the sleeper,
For his brow grows smooth and his heart grows still,
And his breath is slower and deeper.
Come, ring him round, his sleep be sound,
Be all the green moor charmèd ground,
No shape arise to scare his eyes,
His ear be vexed with no shrill cries,
And all that grows in mead or close

Shall sing to him, who feels and knows
The chant and wail of hill and dale,
And every tree shall tell its tale.
Come, brush and scrub,
And tree and shrub,
And hedgerow creeper,
To ring the sleeper!
Ware! aught of evil, or gnome or devil!
And who is the ruler of this our revel?

VOICES APPROACHING FROM BELOW.

Oh! that is the birch, the bonnie green birch,
There is never a spot may her stem besmirch,
But it shines and glistens,
And each one listens
Beneath her, as folk that kneel in a church,
To hear how the birds in her branches sing
The lauds of the year in the blossoming spring.

Mask it round, let all the ground
Throb with treading and with bound;
Tyrant day hath passed away,
Each his form and voice hath found.

THE BIRCH TREE.

Then who come here to open our cheer,
And tell their tale to the poet's ear?

A SONG OF THE VINE, THE HOP, AND THE IVY.

THE VINE SINGS.

A line, good friends, I pray you a line,
A trellis of boughs for these arms of mine;
Here at your feet is the clambering vine,
With amber and purple heavy:
If here I stay on the trampled hill,
Each bursten bunch its store may spill,
And ye get nothing by my goodwill
But sorrow in all your levee.

THE HOP SINGS.

Is there never a tree with a skyward top
And twigs, where I, the wandering hop,
May swing, and cling, and waver, and drop
With tendril, leaf, and bunches?
What never a poplar of you all

To help the hop that gladdens the hall?
The casks will sour with the brew so small
If foot my burden crunches.

THE IVY SINGS.

Which of you climbers, short or tall,
May match with me in bower or hall?
Crown will wither, and bowl will pall,
But mastery hath no measure:
And ye can only deck the trees,
But I am a shirt of Hercules,
I wither their arms, I bow their knees,
And suck their marrow at pleasure.

And ye may bind the reveller's curls,
And brim his cup, till the cresset swirls
Before his eyes like the dancing girls,
And tongue is loosed and quickened;
But mine is a wreath of a stronger kind,—
If man with me his temples bind,
His tongue grows dumb and his eyes grow blind,
And his blood crawls palsy-thickened!

The Birch Tree.

Oh! hop and ivy and vine,
  There is little gain in your telling;
Oh, hop and vine! a draught divine
  At his lips is ever welling:
He drinks of the smart of his own wild heart,
  And his courage passes quelling!

Voices of the Hill-side.

There slides a shadow athwart the moon
  That tarnishes silver earth,
The hill wind's carol is turned to a croon
  That sounds as the knell of our mirth;
The sleeper's face grows worn and grey,
  The strong mouth works and twitches,
Is there no tree that can break their sway,
  Their spell, those hovering witches
Who haunt the air on their marsh-plucked steeds?
  Come, holly, thy cunning try,
And thou, red rowan, all holy weeds
Circle his couch and tell your beads
  Of dew, till the evil fly!

A Song of the Holly, the Rowan, and the Hazel.

Oh! the holly, and the rowan, and the hazel tree,
Which is the blessedest of all us three?
Is the holly, dight with jewel?
Nay! the holly's blood is cruel,
And bindeth the fetterless feet of the free.

Oh! the holly, and the hazel, and the rowan red,
The red round berries the finch have fed,
And the twig of rowan cloven,
When the scarlet thread is woven
Around it, the craft of the witch hath sped.

Oh! the holly, and the rowan, and the hazel green,
Children the blest boughs peer between,
And fear no waiting snake
In the underwood or brake,
To gather of the nuts that were blessed by the Queen.

Aha! the cozening hags have fled,
They found themselves but ill bestead;
The moon uncovers her hidden head,
And looks out pale and frightened;

The earth grows bright in her beams again,
The winds pipe up with a joyful strain,
And the sleeper smooths his frown of pain,
And smiles as his heart were lightened.

THE BIRCH TREE.

Be near, ye bents and meadow grasses
That bend on upland or sleep by stream;
Ye boughs that shade the rocky passes,
Or swing where lights on rivers gleam,
That grace the garden, or shield the mead;
Ye flowers both of hill and glade,
Come here to serve him at his need,
Who hither comes to seek our aid.
Come, open every one her store,
He seeks for soothing and for teaching;
And what is wiser than our lore,
And what is sweeter than our preaching
To him who wanders where thick boughs are round him pleaching?

And here now slumbers such an one
As we may teach, nor dread his scorning,

With sky for tent, and true grey stone
For trusty warder till the morning.
Prone lies the poet on the heather,
His pale face pleads with God above,
And all our tribes must join together
To aid who loves us, whom we love.
Then sing each one her several story,
Nor stint for mirth, or fate, or dole,
With holy rhyme and chant of glory
Fill ye his ear and charm his soul,
So that his waking speech may bless branch, leaf, and bole.

Then each in turn take up the tale,
See that your singing never fail!
And who stands nearest to his head?
The cherry tree—be her carol said!

THE CHERRY TREE SINGS.

When first I stood in orchard row,
Brought forth my virgin blossom
A fruit as stainless as the snow,
As round as maiden's bosom;

Adown the garden Mary came,
And Joseph, bent with sorrow,
For thinking on her fancied shame
Whom he must wed to-morrow.

Sweet Mary stood beneath my boughs,
Her heart grew fain for cherries;
Said she, "I thirst; come, climb, my spouse,
And pull me those ripe berries."

Quoth he, "In climbing, hose may burst,
Mine are too gay for tearing;
Who eased your lust may ease your thirst,
Who wived you, aid your bearing!"

There came a singing from the south,
I hearkened to the singers;
I bowed my boughs, and touched her mouth,
My fruit fell in her fingers.

Then Mary sang, and Joseph wept
For shame and eke for gladness,
And up the swinging branches leapt,
She being eased of sadness.

Now red as heart-drops blush with shame
My berries for that slander!
But blooming still I show her fame,
Who bore the world's commander.

THE ELDER TREE SINGS.

With bunches of white my boughs bestead,
Hither hath come the Judas tree;
Pale as the face of the three days dead.
Oh! never a bride would wreathe her head,
Though the wreath were white, if ye pluck it of me.
But white arrayed, and with flower-crowned head,
Go bride and corpse alike to bed,
And the passing bell is the peal for me.

Berry as black as a traitor's soul;
With a heigh-ho for the Judas tree;
Specious sweet as the lies that roll
Under his tongue, but a burning coal
Each shall prove to eternity.
With worthless heart, and wrinkled bole,
And all of a changeful hue, the goal
Of treachery's paths my branches be.

OMNES.

Now fie on thee, thou Judas tree!
His forehead pinches painfully;
Is this a song for hearing?
What though she said, "Stint not for dole,"
She bade thee not to vex his soul,
Who came to us for cheering,
With such-like ditties of the grave,
Come, chant again some merry stave!
Behold, his brow is clearing!

THE ELDER TREE SINGS.

As I came down by the parson's ditch
Whom should I meet but a toothless witch,
Raking the gutter with skinny arm
To gather her store for a beauty charm?
She had caught a newt and a slimy eel,
Fit for her fisherman master's creel;
She dropped them both to beg me a boon,
A morsel of pith to cozen the moon.
She stretched her fingers my sides to grip,
But I bowed to a breeze, and I gave her the slip,
She clasped the air, did the cursing vixen,
And flat she fell on the parson's mixen.

THE VINE SINGS.

In yonder village there dwells a priest,
He singeth oftener at the feast
Than where his flock turn towards the east;
  He hiccups ban and blessing:
His house is builded all of brick,
And fenced about with a hedge of quick,
And over its walls I grow so thick,
  Well tended for the pressing.

The bricks peep out my leaves between,
As red as if the walls had been
Tippling slyly under the screen,
  Sucking the grapes in quiet;
Wreathed with the vine, and crowned thereby,
The chimney-stacks lean all awry,
As if they had danced in revelry,
  Spell-struck in middle riot.

THE OLIVE TREE SINGS.

Writhen with anguish
  That comes of my toiling
To succour who languish
  Because of earth's spoiling,

Heart's-blood full meekly
I yield to the weakly,
I, the pale olive tree.

Strength to the striver
That toils for my crowning;
And when the shriver
Waves back the fiend's frowning;
Aiding in life and death,
Shade and ease lie beneath
Me, the wild olive tree.

When the lamp dimly
Burns late for the thinkers,
When the board trimly
Is spread for the drinkers,
Still upon me they call,
I gladden cell and hall,
I, the dull olive tree.

He whose hand healeth,
And he with mouth freeing,
He that revealeth
All beauty of being,

Leech, priest, and painter raise
Threefold my constant praise,
Mine, the meek olive tree.

At my feet lying,
The Healer hath blessed me;
Worn with strong crying,
His weary head pressed me
I held the painter-saint
When his great heart grew faint,
I, the strong olive tree.

THE WILLOW SINGS.

White were the stairs of marble stone,
But whiter were His feet,
Flecked with the blood that must atone
For the apple sickly sweet;
As He came down,
Each mocking clown
Arose the King to greet.

It was not yet the time of figs,
But trees were budding fair;

They stripped the lithe long willow twigs—
All things the crime must share—
With rod and scourge
Their guilt to purge
Whose sin the Sinless bare.

And red stains mar the marble stone,
And on the long green leaves
Are blood drops, as the willow lone
Still hangs its head and grieves
By pool and flood,
Where the pale blue bud
The wreath of memory weaves.

Re-enter SPIRIT.

Sink back to your slumberous waving, O children of earth,
For there cometh a breath
From the peaks of the eastern shore, that speaks of birth,
And whispers of death;
The day lies cradled in clouds in the lower sky,
And the old king Night

Is hasting away to his cavern, alone to die
Safe shut from sight,
Lest laughter of day's light courtiers mock at his failing might.

Safe let him lie and pass, alone, unseen
By the leaping brooks,
Unmocked by the glitter of meres that borrow their sheen
From a new king's looks,
Till the trumpeter plover shall herald the rising moon,
Whose mystic light
Shall pierce to his solitude, giving the vampire's boon,
To the dead fresh might,
And the king shall arise from his bonds to rule in his foe's despite.

Then as ye will shall ye sing and disport yourselves,
And it may be none
Shall gather your lore but the pixies and brownies and elves
That flee from the sun;

But memories still shall ye hold of a new-won kin,
Of the man who will flee
Henceforth, when weary with sickness and sorrow and sin,
To your shelter, ye
Who keep for him love, though man show cold, in the woodland free!

THE VOICES OF THE HILL-SIDE.

The bonds must hold us that aye enfold us
When earth-stopped ears are by to mark,
When day shall christen the tears that glisten
Upon our sweet queen birch's bark.
Christen their gleaming with noonday beaming,
And tell of light to the night-dazed folk,
We but with waving must tell of our craving
To burst our bonds, and to break the yoke;
We with our colour our prisonment's dolour
Must mock, and with our murmuring tale
Must tell the breezes how freedom pleases,
And how we fret in our daytide gaol.
His eyelids quiver! to mead and river,
To garth and grove, be each one sped!

But leave we blessing and soft caressing
Around our new-won brother's head!

(*They vanish as the dawn breaks. The Poet wakes and rises, as the sun bursts up from the sea.*)

THE POET.

Yet once again, thou sun, upon my cheek
Thy first kiss falls—thy greeting ever kept
For the unhappy, or for him whose toil
Drags him unwillingly from roughest couch,
Or him who all night long, though softly lapped,
Weary with tossing waiteth for thy spell
To chase the goblins, or for such as I,
Who wait thee for the love of thee, thy friend
That hungers for thy first and best embrace
Before thy toil hath made thee rude and fierce,
Careless of whom thou smitest, friend or foe.
Behold, O fellow-labourer, whose lot,
As mine, is to enlighten earth, to shine
Alike on him who loves and him who loathes,
I come to bear thee fellowship once more,
Strong with thy strength—for in the dreams of night

Fair forms, by thee day-nurtured, sang to me
Of earth and love—of something more than earth,
And more than earthly love—and I am strong
With what thou gavest, and with what He gave
Who gave thee strength to strengthen—with true love.
All-father! most the Father of those few
Whom Thou hast called to suffer and to sing,
Choosing them out as noblest, therefore meet
For sacrifice, bind Thou, if so Thou wilt,
My brow with thorns for bays—let the sweet reed
Pierce through my hand, or let the wild world snatch
That for my smiting—yet the thorns are Thine,
And Thine the reed, fair creatures of Thine hand:
So from Thine hand, and from my greenwood mates
Come smart and wound: the idle cruel world,
Too boastful, deems me smitten through its might;
But now I mock their ignorant cheer, and smile,
Knowing my troubles come of none that hate,
And they who wound will heal. I feel Thy hand
In blessing on my brow in beam and breeze;
And yet there come faint murmurs from Thy groves
That bid me forth to labour lovingly,
Though love find scorning, then, when scorn is sped,
To flee into their coverts and be blest.

Oh, race of man, although with idle scoff
Or torture ye requite who bring you aid,
Although their medicining for your sick souls
Be held a simple thing, yet I bear balm
To heal your evils, and I may not hold!
Perchance in scattering of this my store
Some silly soul may gather, and may bless
The unknown hand that healed him—as I greet
With love those forms, for ever shut from me
In all but dreams, that have assuaged my care,
And taught me. Now no more the mountain peaks
Must nurse my spirit, homely haunts of men,
The long ploughed furrows where the toilers sweat,
And, for refreshing, yon bright rolling sea,
Where yet is labour, now must lesson me!
Oh, earth, I come! oh, patient earth, thy son
Comes back at last to labour and to love!

A LEGEND OF ATHELNEY.

A LEGEND OF ATHELNEY.

(FROM THE METRICAL CHRONICLE OF WULFSTAN OF HEXHAM. CIRCA 809.)

WHEN that our Alfred reigned in land,
(God grant his soul in bliss to come,
For that he was both wise and bland,
And loved his people, all and some,)
For God's glory, and souls' health,
He thought it good that of his wealth
His workmen, whom he paid their fee,
Should build a house right royally,
To harbour monks in Athelney.

This Athelney, as you shall know,
It lies 'twixt Thone and Parrett's flow,
Begirt with marsh, and water lea,
And fen, most dreary for to see;
So that no man may pass therein
Unless by coracle he win,

Or boune him by the goodly bridge
King Alfred threw from ridge to ridge,
And guarded with the Mason's tower,
Which keeps the causeway to this hour.

With ashlar good and timber stout
The masons built the walls about;
With holy strain that churchmen sing
The monks they made the walls to ring;
At foggy morn their matin lay
Awaked the wildfowl ere the day,
Prevented cock, or red or grey.
Our candles lit the mist without
Before the sun had come about
From giving them of Paynimrie
The only light they e'er shall see:
God bring them into jeopardy!

Now Satan, having gathered might,
Had dimmed the lamp of learning's light,
That wont in Britain to burn bright
In days of Bede, whom God requite!
And on the faith fell such a blight,
That all men thought it great despite

To wear the virgin robe of white,
As chastity had been rebuke.
So when the abbey was to fill
Were none would come its walls intil,
Save babes, and broken men, and ill:
Thus saints are shamed of sinners still,
And they of simple, supple will
Get wisdom past the scholar's skill,
As saith the doctor, holy Luke.

Thus safety being scorned of all,
The king, lest his device should fall,
Sent into far and hither Gaul,
And holy men from thence let call
Until the choir was full, each stall.
To these were joined of Saxon kin
A few, eschewing ease and sin,
Who had for goal the golden gate,
And would not carry Mammon's weight;
Of these, I Wulfstan, who am least,
Was one, as yet uncrowned of priest,
But servitor, as fits to be
For novice in his first degree:
Sancte Neote, pray for me!

The first who there took abbothood,
Hight John, he came of Saxon blood,
As it was very meet.
He was well stricken into age,
A cunning man both still and sage,
Deep read in home and stranger page,
Well versed the war of words to wage,
Or quell, with quiet, noisy rage,
Both gentle and discreet.
He was a gracious tender man
As ever heretic did ban,
Or bless the fruit at Hallowmas.
Thus all our house well ordered was.

It is well known, from ancient days,
That never man might Gaul y-praise
If he would soothly write;
They are a people lecherous,
Full prone to change and treacherous,
Small made and mean of height.
Take thou no Gaulish faith for wand,
That rod shall break and pierce thine hand,
As abbot John was dight.

Therefore it was but ill bethought
Of Alfred, since for weal he wrought,
That Gauls into our house he brought
To work us strife and shame;
And chiefly those accursèd two
Who gave us all to wail and rue
The coming of the stunted crew
That brought us in disfame.

A priest there was in Athelney,
Not long delivered from the sea,
Unto a deacon joinèd he
Himself in foul conspiracy
That our lord abbot slain should be,
Forsooth, none witteth why;
Either they envied of his place,
Or hated as of higher race,
Or else for his much learning's sake
Their wounded wits would vengeance take,
Who could not frame reply.

It was the use of abbot John,
That every night, when day was done,

Into the church he took his way,
For living and for dead to pray.
And there alone would pray and strive,
Fight for the souls of some alive
Who still resisted him, and plead
For all the known and unknown dead;
We found him often kneeling there
When nocturn bell brought all to prayer.

The lamp that told how Heaven's King
Sat throned on altar, lit a ring
  Before the holy place.
Into that light the abbot came,
And knelt beneath the swinging flame,
  Down bending on his face;
Then, gazing upwards to those Eyes
That watched above the sacrifice,
  Began his suit of grace.
Forth creeping from uplifted lid
Stole out the caitiffs whence they hid,
And smote him sore; but up he rose,
And grappled in a sturdy close:
He deemed no man would dare to smite
Within the ring of sacred light,

So loud upon the saints he cried
That devils in that Hallowtide
Would stop his heavenward race.

But not alone content to shout,
With stalwart arm he laid about
With one of the great banner poles
That bore St. Helen at All Souls,
Till either wretch had broken crown,—
So hard the abbot's blows came down.
Had he not stronger foes to fight,
This John had been a goodly knight;
But monks were all well-nurtured then,
And knew to quit themselves like men,
To fight as well as pray:
Perchance 'tis right a monk be meek,
But all men now seem something weak;
It may be in these peaceful days
'Tis right no arm of flesh to raise;
But things went well when bows were strung
In resting hours, and beams were swung:
We wrestled well, nor I the least,—
I take no glory,—and each feast

Saw all turn out, from toil released,
At quarterstaff to play.

Now when the abbot's cry was heard
Of " Devils, devils !" at that word
Each man came running from his cell,
Like women at the tocsin bell,
And down the stair we fled amain
To seek the shelter of the fane,—
And help ere abbot John were slain.
But when the chapel door we burst,
Most piteous sight ! these men accurst,
Although beneath his feet they lay,
Too maimed to hide or flee away,
Had wounded him full sore.
Against the cross we saw him cling,
We never thought to hear him sing,
Nor bless his children more.

With many tears, with many groans,
We raised him fainting from the stones,
And wit you well that no man there
Beat breast, or cried as in despair,

More loudly than the Gaulish two
Who worked this woe ; whom God beshrew !

But, thanks to God and good St. Neot,
They met the meed of foul deceit,
And they with both their slaves were slain
In fitting wise, and through much pain
Came abbot John to strength again ;
Whom God assoil, in bliss to reign !

IN THE DESERT.

IN THE DESERT.

A Sandy Desert. Sunset. Enter AHASUERUS, *the Wandering Jew.*

IF I could but be sure that this vague world
And meaningless, which yet so clear a line
Marks for my prison-yard, while every speck
Of wind-blown sand shouts morals in his ear
Who, shadow, ranges shade, were near its end!
More shadowy before the eyes of men
Than false lake of this desert is my shape,
More sharply graven in men's memories
My doom than pillowed temple of the rocks;
And I, in nowise tending to give light
On that they seek for, ever stand aloft,
A beacon, warning where the shallows lie.

I and this world we change not—'tis our doom
To dwell together till the final fire;

And whether then we thereby purified
Shall live again, or whether she shall pass
And I begin a worse eternity,
I know not—even change of woe were change.
Man, blest in swiftly passing nights and days,
And more in failing strength, that comes of years
To lay him to his rest, than manhood's might,
Comes from the earth, that casts him helpless forth,
And, helpless, seeking her from whom he came,
Finds her unchanged, still fair and pitiless.
I passed a cottage door a while ago
At eventide, and sought a sheltering;
And thereby was an old man, blind and hoar,
That lay a-dying, whom I gazed upon,
Remembering other days; and at the dawn,
As I looked down on him, the angel came
To kiss him, whereupon his eyesight cleared
And all his mind grew clear, and I was known
The grey friend of his childhood in the smile
That left the old dead face so smooth and fair.
They, blessing me for tears of sympathy,
Not guessing at the truth, might never guess
How tears from sweet turned bitter when I stood
Without, within the porch, and watched the dawn

Grow rosy through the long dark poplar-row,
And felt the white bloom of the virgin's bower
Swing odorous about my throbbing brow,
As crowning me in scoff at endless age;
While all the heavy rooks that, querulous,
In dreams all night had chattered of the nests,
Now, thoughtful-voiced, took flight about the elms
Whence years ago, with shout and clapping hands,
He scared their fathers who were dust long since;
And he drew on to quiet blessèd dust;
But I and earth, unchanged, still wept and smiled.

Yet there come certain whispers of a change:
Before the day I sat beneath a palm,
Thinking how hot this desert sand would be,
Half thinking to turn back and seek the west;
When in the green oasis' topmost boughs
A sound as of a going, yet no wind
Stirred any leaf, and, rather inly heard
Than striking outward ear, there ran a cry,
"All finished, finished! But one nightfall more—"
No more for listening; the sun rose up
Red, round, and beckoning; but in the east
A dying murmur seemed to summon me

To find what might be hidden in the east
Of knowledge, or of hope-transcending lore.
So I go on, and think no more to turn,
Still journeying to find that far-off goal
Where light undazzling shall refresh my sight,
And music greet the fever-quickened sense
That tells me all is silent; and I think
The time draws on, and absolution comes.

A sound of music—a white moving mist
Curls round about me, shaping into forms
That beckon me—white maidens, wondrous fair,
With timbrels and with dances; who is this
That smiles on me, and heads the giddy throng,
Slow pacing forth to meet me? whose that babe
That from her bosom stretches tiny hands
To greet me? Miriam! mine own sweet bride,
I weened the earth had closed on thee and him,
And comest thou again? It must be so!
The end hath come, and all the blessèd dead,
She the most blessèd, come to summon me
To rest; it must be so! and, hark, she sings!

THE TEMPTER SINGS.

Come, turn aside, thou weary one,
  Lo ! she who calls thee, turn aside,
  Thine own, thy long-forgotten bride,
That bear with me thy little son,
Who leaves to nestle and smile on me,
  And leaves to fumble at my breast,
To crow and stretch his arms to thee :
  Ah ! better, love, to lie at rest,
  By wife and child in ease caressed,
Beneath the shining citron tree,
  Than here to wander, lorn, unblessed,
In wastes where no delights there be.

The maidens that bear me their company
Behold how they smile and they beckon to thee,
As hand-locked around thee in measure they swing
With dulcimer, flute and with cymbal's ring ;
And the timbrels clash in the still clear air,
And the anklets flash in the desert's glare,
And the white bare heaving bosoms gleam,
And the long white robes of the dancers stream,

Waved by the breeze of the swift white feet.
Come to mine arms, love! Ah! more sweet
To lie at peace in the scented grove,
Apart from the world, and alone with love,
Than here to roam, and mourn, and brood
On a by-gone curse, and the long-dried blood.
The fruits are spread, and the wine is poured,
And a bank of moss is our festal board,
Where the cold stream gushes beneath the leaves,
And the wild dove croons in the leaf-built eaves,
And the boughs hang low, so very low,
That they dip their tips in the river's flow;
There will we lie and, hidden, kiss,
And none shall know of our hidden bliss,
Save these, who shall sit by the streamlet's brim
With laughter and song and a bridal hymn,
Tuned to the bells of the timbrels round,
That spin in the air with a smothered sound,
Because of the leaves that shield us twain
From earth—long severed, one again.

CHORUS OF DEMONS.

Where lies the perfect rest?
Is it in desert sands that glow and burn
By arms of day caressed,
And from the sun's hot kisses may not turn
Until he seek the west,
And even then distressed
With knowledge of his coming, faint and yearn
For his last hour, their tyrant fair and stern?

The dim oasis lies
Cloistered from fevered kiss of wanton beam;
Therein no sound of cries,
But evermore the ripple of the stream
Makes mournful melodies,
And in the cedar trees
The cushat woos his mate, as in a dream,
With sad glad note, and love is all his theme.

Better for thee, thou man,
To kiss thine own beneath the hanging shade,
Than here to bear the ban
That cruel lips upon thy life have laid;

If life be but a span,
Better thy cheeks so wan,
Thy fevered eyes, in close sequestered glade
Grow white and bright for gazing on some maid,

Than here in desert air
With gazing on a pale earth-covered face:
What though the face was fair!
Hadst thou from its fair seeming smile such grace
That thou this toil canst dare,
Where hot as heated share
The hot sands greet thy feet? There is no place
For hope—time hastens—rest a little space!

AHASUERUS.

Ah me! my Miriam, not with careless song
Didst thou beguile me, not with wanton dance,
But with the modesty of shrouded brow,
And witchery of low, tear-broken speech,
When first I sought thee: other guise than this
Thou heldest when I raised mine arm to strike
The Crucified—there was a rout as loud
As these, but they were women worn and pale

With watching, who cried out upon the crowd;
And thou wert low in speech, and sweet as now,
But in a different sort; thy babe as now
Lay cradled on thy breast, and stretched his arms—
Not to his sire, but to the Crucified,—
As thou, for love of womankind who bore,
And love of man and common brotherhood,
For love of God, half-hidden in this man,
Didst pray some respite,—yet I granted not.
How comest thou with all this wanton rout
That move me from my penance with their song,
Seeking to rob me of the rest I seek
By cheating me with rest? Yet thou art fair
As in the days I knew, and these are fair,
And is not this my son? Lone, lone, and lost,
I have gone wandering so long, so long!
Sure I have earned some quiet! Have with you!

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

When man abode in Paradise,
There was in gardens once
A perfect rest defying price;
But man, so eager to be wise,

Hath proved himself a dunce
That toileth still and straineth:
And yet a rest remaineth.

The serpent dwelt in Paradise,
A good beast and a kindly;
But Satan, coming tempter-wise,
Filled all the poor beast's mouth with lies,
And Eve she listened blindly,
And living-kind complaineth:
And yet a rest remaineth.

By wells of water, where the trees
Bow down to kiss the flowers
That, anchored, rock to morning breeze,
And spread their silver chalices
To catch the morning showers,
No final rest man gaineth:
And yet the rest remaineth.

In tender voice, in song of bird,
In psaltery's soft rhyming,—
So sweet because more felt than heard,—

In sound of kisses timing
The hours that ask no chiming,
There is no rest, earth waneth:
Only the rest remaineth.

Remaineth in a garden ground
Where groweth rose and lily,
Remaineth where the waters sound,
Where never wind blows chilly,
Nor harsh voice echoes shrilly,
Where the Rose-lily reigneth,
There the true rest remaineth.

A little while, a little heat,
A little loneliness,—
And endless time that grows more sweet,
And warmth with no distress,
And fellowship to bless
His rest who rest obtaineth:
The final rest remaineth.

AHASUERUS.

Where be those forms that wooed me even now?
Gone—whither? But the air is full of shapes

That float with folded hands beside my path;
And I, I feel as quiet as these friends,
And will go with them; but my mouth is dry,
My feet are both so weary with this sand
That will not bear, and burns them as they sink.
Would the great flood were come again to float
This desert into ocean! I could swim,
Stretched out upon its tide, and rise and fall
For forty days, while all my body drank,
And I lay resting me on swell of waves.
A lake, blue, bright, and crisping to my feet
With tiny ripples! How the water flees,
And will not let me wade! I must lie down;
Yet all the lake sinks down—it is there yet;
And what is this that swims up under me?
A Face, thorn-crowned and quiet, a still Face,
Such as she found upon her napkin's fold
Who had more grace than I; such as looked up,
Blood dropped, into my face, as now It looks
To bless me with Its ban—Ah, Lord, no more!
Have I not wandered after Thee in vain?
Have I not borne Thy cross? The simple folk
All bless my coming, since I tell of Thee;
The little children hang about my knees;

The hounds are silent when they hear my step;
Am I not blessed at last, who have such might?
Blest in the charity Thy curse hath taught.

THE GUARDIAN ANGEL.

For wound, or green or cankered, of offence,
A sovereign balm is penitence:
But how shall penitence be shown?
By goodly fruit well-grafted stock is known.
Then of thy lips now let the fruit
Show how in heart deep lies the root;
Speak out and shame thyself, and tongue of shame
Thy triumph shall proclaim.

AHASUERUS.

It was about the third hour of the day,
When under the green fig-tree at my door
I lay at length upon the threshold bench,
Blessing the feast that let me from my toil,
And gave my senses time to glut themselves
With grace of being, the strong delight of life.
As thus I lay and drank the sunlight in,

A-listening for the cicala's chirp,
There came a measured swing of tramping feet
Mixed with the sullen murmur of a crowd,
An inarticulate roar that clamoured "Blood!"
While, ever nearer, shrilling over all,
Echoed the mourners: then a flash of steel—
The Roman guards, ensign and eagle led;
A waving of white robes—the holy priests
With all their following, and all the scum
That cursed the bye-lanes of Jerusalem,
And certain women tearing veil and hair,—
These ushering, those pursuing, one weak man.
One man,—so weak, so faint beneath the weight
Of that He bore, whereof He must be borne,
The cross, the meed of slaves; yet He was Lord
Of those same devils which then drave the mob
To hound Him on to death Who gave them life
But for the asking, never asking life,
Nor even respite, in their hour of might.
Methought, "The mighty are brought low to-day:
No robes before Thy feet, Thou Conqueror!
No palms to greet Thee, no white ass to bear
Thine honoured body, and a different cry
From that they cried, who now upbraiding shout

Till all the stones give back their clamouring,
And hollow distance mutters 'Crucify!'"
As thus I mused He reached the fig-tree's shade;
The guard had halted—then He looked on me
With drooping, blood-filmed eyes, and, in such tones
As a fast-falling wind might wake from harp
That erst rang sweet and clear, prayed me for rest:
I, idly as I lay, with spurning foot
Struck at him, crying "On to death, thou slave!"
Whereat the dim eyes for a moment's space
Grew wide and clear and sad, and that bent form
Towered in majesty, while deep and stern
The voice rang out against me, "I to death
Go on, indeed; but thou to endless life
Shalt still go on, until I come again!"
I sat astonished with a sudden dread
While all the rout swept by me, and He passed.

CHORUS OF ANGELS.

The day is over and finished,
The night draws on apace,
Already glare diminished
Gives to the gloaming place;

A breeze comes out of the west,
With a whisper of falling leaves
That fall on the place of rest
Where man no longer grieves;
A light grows clear in the east,
No light of moon or star,
But a beam from above released,
That streams from the golden bar
Which angels now uplifting
From heaven's great portals heave.
The corn is meet for the sifting,
The spinners have naught to weave.
The toil is done and the trial,
Dull be thine ear and eye
While the mouth of the golden vial
O'ershadows earth and sky:
Be deaf and dumb and blind a little space,
Sleep, weary one, to wake with freshened face,
Heaven sends thee so much grace!

(AHASUERUS *falls motionless, as it becomes suddenly dark night.*)

LETHE WATER.

LETHE WATER.

OVER the moors my mood hath brought me,
With pace unequal, an unknown way;
The flints have cut me, the brambles caught me,
My blood marks where I wont to stray.
Full often over foot and knee
The treacherous green that wooed my treading
Hath drawn me in, full drearily
The rocks by night have made my bedding.
I flee by homestead, thorpe, and city,
Mine ear is deaf to prayer and threat,
What recks to me their scorn or pity?
Can tears or laughter pay their debt
Who drove me forth from man to wander,
From mine own self in hope to flee,
To scour the waste, and gaze, and ponder
Where that grey flood I seek may be?
O Lethe water, when shall I view thee?
Grief and Memory lie by my soul,

And Memory cries to Grief, "Renew thee!"
And fainting Grief at her voice grows whole.

A marvellous flood must Lethe be,
A dim wan water, a tideless sea,
Flooding for ever a flat low sand,
With no white winnowing pinions fanned,
That never listens to torrent's roar;
And no green sedges upon that shore
May house the gnat or the dragonfly,
But bare red rocks will stand thereby,
Red with the heart-wrung tears of those
Who wept ere they drank and forgot their woes.
The thick wet mists will sleep on the mere,
Lest breeze or beam should ruffle its cheer,
A sorry cheer!—and I shall tear
The rue-wreath from my faded hair,
And fling it in, and watch it sink,
And lie down wearily and drink,—
Rise joyless up, with no distress,
Set free from thought, mute, passionless.

Ah me! earth's plaything and its fool,
'Tis surely time to cease from striving!

I put me under the world's wild rule,
It paid me in death with a show of living!
Yet had I dreamed that the toil I gave
So frankly and freely, a willing slave,
The world would take at least, though grudging
The labourer's meed, and so my drudging
Should bring forth fruit; but the fields are tilled,
And the world goes by, and with husks is filled,
Spurning the sower, for so the world in its wisdom willed.

O Lethe water! shall twilight, breaking
The spell of sunlight that chains me here,
Never descend and find me slaking
My heart thirst at the lonely mere?
I lie upon the moorland's border,
And all below the land dips down,
Set full of boughs in some wild order,
That bend together by hill winds blown,
Whence answer to the low breeze blowing
The sounds of far-off waters flowing.
And were it not for my ceaseless quest,
And were it not I am grown too old,
I would lie down in the fern to rest,
And hunt in the grass for red and gold;

Gold and red were all my treasure,
The buds that ask to be spread to the sun,
While beetles hummed me a drowsy measure,
And snap the threads that the spiders spun
For dawn to string with glittering beads.
Far up the narrow rift recedes,
Spreading away in a leafy haze
To yonder hill whose silent peak
Shuts out the sky, and crowned with rays
Like some grey monarch, stern and bleak
Stands under the blue hanging sky,
That seems to wrap it lovingly,—
And down the banks my way must go,
Beneath the branches hanging low,
Over the hidden water's flow.
No longer hidden ; a little river
Lashing the rocks that stay its course,
Long reeds that wade, and, fearful, quiver
To feel the hurrying water's force ;
And underneath this hanging bank,
Where dropping down my hot feet sank
In this green moss so pleasantly,
Amid the flowers let me lie
Under the hazel boughs at length,

And drink, and gather newer strength,—
For it is far to seek, my quest!
Nay, out upon yon rock were best,
The flat rock in the middle stream,
Beneath whose shade the waters dream
Safe harboured in the still bright pool:—
Ah! sweet these waters be, most passing sweet and cool!

* * * * *

Lush long green grass,
Full to the shoulder,
Over which lights pass;
Rush, sand and boulder
Woo the waters to their keeping
Where the white pools lie a-sleeping,
Break them up to sparkle, leaping
Where the sun rays through the boughs come creeping.

Here let me lie down,
Here by the river,
Whence come the floods brown,
Hastening whither?
Out of caves where crystals lying,
Light their cells are still denying

Crave, and weep, and thereby dying
Pass into the day, from darkness flying.

All my hair wind-blown,
Long, wet, and flowing,
Asketh a flower crown
To stay its blowing:
Floating down and floating farther
Go green twigs; I wot some bather
Lost his wreath, but I must gather
Blossoms, they beseem my gladness rather.

A footstep on the further shore,
And who is yon dotard bent and hoar
That mutters still to himself, and moans,
And sinks half-way on the stepping stones?
His grey head droops to the stream as he sinks,
He laves his hands and his brow, and drinks,
And riseth up in a silent calm.
Whence hath his pain such sudden balm?

Tell me, thou old wayfarer,
How do they call this flood?

"I know not, son, but bearer
Am I of tidings good;
For the ripples say not far away
Are shade and the silent wood."

Pass to thy shade; be sunlight mine
While sweetness lives in the wild woodbine,
I would no deeper than comes of the leaves,
And little the ripple mine hearing grieves
With tale of silence, but chimes as it flees
With crush of cushats in whispering trees,
And the faint low sigh of this summer breeze.

Tell me, thou thoughtful maiden,
That comest now from the stream,
Why stepping down care-laden,
And reckless as I deem,
After thy drinking at that spring
Thou ceasest thin white hands to wring?
Thy palms lie crossed on quiet breast,
Parted a little as in rest
Thy wan lips smile, and thy wild eyes
Grow mild. Is cure of agonies

In but a draught from wild hill brook?
  Hast thou no name for this that healed?
Whence is it that thy grief forsook
  Thy careful soul? Be all revealed!
  Pass not, I pray thee, with thy lips still sealed!

"What tellest thou me of sorrow?
  I know not whence is the stream,
But still it sings of to-morrow;
  I scarce am free of my dream,—
Sure I have dreamed! But who that hears
The river's tale but must cease from fears?
  The tale of quiet that conquers riot,
Of sleep for waking, and smiles for tears."

Welcome, welcome! over the brook,
  Thou little child, come over!
Beside me in this shady nook
  Come, rest awhile, thou rover!
And we will away to the fields and look
  For honey-bees under the clover.

And we will sleep on new-mown cocks,
And tell the time by meadow-clocks,

And make us hats of broad green docks,
With lily leaves and flowers;
Nuts and berries shall be our food,
We'll woo the pigeons from their brood
To hush us, when in drowsy mood
We lie by hedgerow bowers.

For I have looked to find a mate,
And thou art he without debate;
Come on before the day grows late,
The western sky grows yellow;
Come on! but tell me ere we go
This stream that through the wood doth flow,
How call you it? Sure thou must know!
Come rede me, my sweet fellow!

"I know not whence the waters come,
They go I care not whither;
But they always sing, and are never dumb,
And they cry 'Come hither, hither!
All who weep or wofully dream.'
Well I know what the waters say,
For I bathe and I drink of them day by day,
And Lethe water they call the stream."

THE HISTORY OF SUSANNA.

THE HISTORY OF SUSANNA.

I.

IN Babylon some time a man there dwelt,
Hight Joachim, a lord of sheep and beeves,
A lord of dates, of sesame, and spelt,
A lord of gardeners, of hinds and reeves,
Of brick-built halls, and huts with straw-laid eaves;
Lord also was this ancient worthy man
Of a young, fresh, fair wife, ycleped Susanne.

II.

This fair Susanna came of Levi's race,
The child of Chelcias, the aged priest;
Full young he gave her to her lord's embrace,
Whose beard was grey as is that noisome beast
The burrowing badger; yet each year increased
Their equal-aged young love, and three brave boys
Stood in the gate to ward their life's annoys.

III.

She was all brown and red as is an apple,
And straight as are the poplars by a stream;
Her black hair hung gold-coifed about her thrapple,
She had a voice like voices in a dream,
Deep, sweet, and slow, with smothered power of scream;
And her great eyes were like the fishponds twelve
Which the wise king in Heshbon caused to delve.

IV.

So stately was her step, that all rejoiced
To see her pass, like some fair forest beast,
And men on strangers' backs would ask a hoist
To watch her, when, from woman's bonds released,
Beside her lord, when Babylon held feast,
She passed to kindred boards about the town,
Her three small children plucking at her gown.

V.

So all men loved her with a simple love,
As pure as gentle brother bears to sister:

Yet there were twain, who feared nor God above,
Nor fiend below, whose fire their souls doth blister,
Who dreamed o' nights their withered lips had kissed her,
Their palsied arms had made her waist a band;
Two lewd wise fools, and elders of the land.

VI.

So on a day, when causes were to hear,
To Joachim assembled all the folk;
And when the wrong was right, and dark was clear,
Departed each, set free from evil yoke,
Veiling their brows to ward the hot sun's stroke:
Then Joachim to sleep through heat he lay,
And fair Susanna gat her forth to play.

VII.

She had a garden, that before or after
None such was seen, the which her lord let build,
Upheld by terraces of stone and rafter;
In different heights the rising slopes were tilled,
And so with diverse lusts her soul was filled,
Since in her garden, in a summer's day,
She might 'twixt Thulè voyage and Cathay.

VIII.

Here in the plain were meads with fringe of sallow,
By streams that nursed the sad forget-me-not,
Where blushed herb-willow, and the ruddier mallow,
And trout beneath the nodding flag-flower shot;
Mount but a stair, and all was clean forgot,
Because the roses, myrtles, and rose-bays
Had wooed the feet to tread in sunnier ways.

IX.

There might you lie on lawns, and hear the fountain,
Slow singing, all the nightingales invite
To quench their thirst; another stair, the mountain
Was all around, with heather bell bedight,
With mosses parti-coloured, loud with flight
Of hawk and plover, and the streams around
On rock leapt errant-wise or soaked the ground.

X.

Among the myrtles was a shining tank
That wooed to bathing, fashioned of four-square,
In whose white water myrtle shadows sank,

Where floated myrtle flowers had weighed the air
With sweetness, were their sweetness not so rare;
White were its walls and floor, and, for descent,
Nine steps of jasper green there downward went.

XI.

So to the going down of this clear pool,
Up through her garden, came Susanna fair,
And sat down, dipping in its waters cool
Her feet grown hot with tripping up the stair,
That shone as white-hot in the noontide glare;
Leaning a little back to catch the breeze
That crowned her with the spoil of myrtle trees.

XII.

Anon she rose up slowly, and lay down
Upon the steps beside the water's edge,
Wondering her little feet should look so brown
As they hung over the green shining ledge;
With that a red flower floating from the hedge,
Long falling, settled with short swirls, and dips
Where smiled her image's full pouting lips.

XIII.

Whereby there rose a longing in her heart
To be in that still water, and to lie
With half-shut eyes and arms widespread apart,
And all her flowering trees for canopy;
To look up through the myrtles to the sky,
While their white flowers on her floating hair
Should fall half felt, and on her bosom bare.

XIV.

So bid her maidens fetch her wherewithal
She should be decked when that she tired of bathing;
Then all alone she loosed the golden caul
That bound her locks, and fast her limbs unswathing
From silken folds, she sat, nor dreamed of scathing,
A moment, ere she would the water dare,
As innocent as Eve, as void of care.

XV.

Low singing: "Ah, thou sun! a warmer kiss
Than thine hath my young son; thou summer sky,
Thy clouds have not a swifter pace than his,

And thou art pale to his beseeching eye!
Ye throstles! cease for shame your melody,
When my young son comes singing through the fern
That clings around his feet to bid him turn."

XVI.

Meanwhile these twain of whom I told but now
Had watched her from an oriel as she went;
In either heart the fire began to glow
At thought of her alone in garden hent,
So, neither dreaming of his mate's intent,
They went out diverse ways with hasty pace,
And, tracking crossing paths, met face to face.

XVII.

Quoth he, "What! go we dine?" then said that other
"Aye, go we dine; farewell!" and turned about;
Then either hurried, careless curse to smother,
Another way, and both again came out
Upon a lawn, and met, and leant in doubt,
With peering rheumy eyes, upon their staves,
In tottering fear and haste, these hoary knaves.

XVIII.

At length they showed each other their desire,
And wagged their shaking heads, and grinned and champed
With toothless jaws, and mumbled praises dire
Of her they sought, that would the heat have damped
Of listening youth, and swollen feet they stamped
Upon the ground, and shook their sticks and coughed,
Linked arms, and hobbled to the upland croft.

XIX.

While still Susanna sang, "Thou rosy bud,
Come, lie upon my little son's soft cheek,
And pine to see how far the mantling blood
Outreds thy glory when he hears me speak:
Ye myrtle knops, his creamy bosom seek,
Wherein ye brown shall show, and his pure breath
Shall make your sweetness rank as smell of death."

XX.

Oh! she was fair and brown as that wild bride
That kissed with Solomon when vines were green:
She rose up fearlessly, and turned to slide

Into her wave; but through the thicket's screen
Leapt those vile wooers who too long had seen
Her grace, unknown before to all below,
And stammering they clutched her, shrieking "Woe!"

XXI.

"Nay, pretty one; but hearken to my plaint,"
Said either greybeard, grasping at an arm;
Then she, as quietly as that white saint
Who shamed the Romans, Agnes, growing calm,
Looked up and said, "From this and other harm,
Thou God! protect me, though the elders fail;
Watch Thou Thy sheep, although Thy herds assail.

XXII.

"Old men, have ye not eaten in our hall?
Have ye not drunken? Hath the meed of salt
No power to shield me? Fie! thou whited wall,
Fit couch awaits thee in thy funeral vault.
What bride for thee but death, thou maimed and halt!
Go, weep and wash your hearts, and yield your place
To better men, and see no more my face!"

XXIII.

So these old dotards, growing mad with shame,
Heard voices and cried out in spiteful haste,
" Harrow alas ! for Joachim's fair fame,
That by a wanton wife is here disgraced ;
Oh that our feet had youth ! then we had chased
The naked boy who slipping through the boughs
Hath left his leman, Joachim's lewd spouse."

XXIV.

Susanna, when her people heard this cry,
Rising imperious, waved all aside ;
She clad herself, then in calm dignity
Of innocence she slowly homeward hied,
Followed by whispering girls her face that eyed,
Half frightened, half approving ; so she came
Unto her lord, and showed him all her shame.

XXV.

All day she lay beside her husband's feet,
Who sat astonied, one hand on her hair ;
Her only draught was tears, and for his meat

He saw it cool, and seeing took no care,
Only at sunset rose, and stood in prayer;
And all night long he stood, all night she lay,
She for her babes, and he for her to pray.

XXVI.

Then on the morrow early came the tribes
To Joachim, the elders summoning:
Before the whole assembly soon the scribes
And doctors bade the woman men should bring,
That all might judge her who had done this thing,
And wrought this folly, lest that Israel,
For guilt unpunished, some new curse befell.

XXVII.

They brought her forth, and set her in the midst,
All her ripe beauty hidden with her vail;
Then said one dotard, "Strip thee, as thou didst
To meet thy leman," and with rude assail
Tore off her covering, and one long wail
Broke from the people when they saw her face,
To think that fire should mar her gentle grace,

XXVIII.

With many words they clamoured, and, short rede,
She was but one, and witnesses were twain;
So was the stake adjudged the harlot's meed,
Though all men wept aloud; nor day must wane
Ere they should lead her out into the plain
Beyond the city wall to brook the fire;
Already logs were chopping for her pyre.

XXIX.

Then she arose all clad in virgin white,
She only calm in all the weeping crowd,
And sweeping her long hair to left and right
With hands impatient, as with power endowed
Of prophetess, she stood up pale and proud,
And spoke, while every man lent eager ear,
And doomsters stayed their cursèd touch for fear:

XXX.

"Accurst for ever be this weary day
That gives me guiltless to a guile-wrought doom!
Let never sun call man or maid to play,

But slow shower dripping wrap the earth in gloom!
Let heaven weep whom earth denies a tomb,
Let wind sing dirges for me, else unwept,
When I in peace go singing,—having slept.

XXXI.

"Ye men of Juda! since to put away
A fancied ill ye work this bitter wrong,
Look no more for a home-returning day!
Ye maids of Juda! let no bridal song
Awake your longing! for men's tongues are strong,
Although their might be little; think on me
When lover sues, and seek the willow tree!

XXXII.

"Have I not dwelt among you in accord?
Are not my fathers with you at this hour?
Here be the three young sons I bare my lord,
They rise and bless me, but their sire doth cower,
And ye stand idle, and the fiend hath power:
Forsooth! I am a woman, and but one,
Here be two men, and thus am I undone!

XXXIII.

"I go in fire—so went Elias hoary;
No tomb ye carve me—where is Moses' grave?
My name is stolen from our nation's story—
What if of me came forth who must you save?
Shall they not name her name who safety gave?
Shall any dare to brand her honoured name,
Who bore the hero, with a word of shame?

XXXIV.

"Sons of my grief, in whom my hope is stored,
Forget not all my love and bitterness!
When your young hands are fitting to the sword,
Think how to you alone in my distress
I clung, you only true; this wrong redress,
And let your glory cover this my shame,
Your young hearts fired at this sad funeral flame!"

XXXV.

She ceased, and wrapped her veil about her head,
And first of all the throng passed through the gate,
The doomsters following her with stealthy tread,

As wolves that track a hind whom shades belate,
And all the rear brought up both kin and mate,
With ashes on each head, and robes ungirt,
Wailing her dirge, yet owning her desert.

XXXVI.

Yet stayed she once in this her doleful march,
To look out ere she through the gate would go.
She saw, dark-framed by that high yawning arch,
The meadow grass, the ripe corn bending low,
Sun-ripened and with wind, Euphrates' flow
That flashed between the willows of the plain,
And wrung her hands and wrapped her face again.

XXXVII.

Then from the shadow forth there stepped a youth,
With covered head and upstretched hands, that cried,
"Thou God, who hid'st in heaven Thy very truth,
Dost Thou not mark how here Thou art defied?
Yet bear me witness, when this woman died
At least I owned Thee, yielding no consent;
My hands at least were white and innocent."

XXXVIII.

Then all the doctors, while the mass drew nigh,
Held open council and close communing,
Whether he raved in Bedlam fantasy
Or if of God for warning came this thing:
At length they judged it best this youth to bring
Into the judgment hall, and there again
To lead Susanne, and those accusing twain.

XXXIX.

There set they Daniel, ruddy-cheeked and slight,
In chair of dais, saying, "It is meet
Whom heaven lightens with its hidden light
Should be the teacher: sit we at his feet."
Uprising then he spoke: "Full foul deceit
Hath blinded you. Let those be set apart
Who charge Susanna: God shall bare each heart."

XL.

Which being done, he took the foremost, saying,
"Tell me, thou just one, how these twain were found,
Whom thou didst timely baulk of sinful playing."

"Beneath an oak, whose branches sweep the ground,"
Quoth he, "they lay, moss-couched, the only sound
Their kisses, hidden in the thicket's gloom."
Quoth Daniel, "Well, thyself hath sealed thy doom."

XLI.

"Fetch me that other;" and the second said,
Being like questioned, "On a sunny bank
They laughing braved the light, while overhead
A rose-hedge blushed, and at their feet the tank
Grew wan." Then all the people, rising, shrank
Back from the liars, brushing sleeve and cloak
As tainted by their touch, and Daniel spoke:

XLII.

"O men of Juda! not in vain ye raise
The pile beside Euphrates, not in vain
The hangmen wait to feed the hungry blaze:
Lo! for one victim here I give them twain.
Go! lead these traitors to the darkening plain,
And let their penal fire put back the night;
This be my Ajalon, and God our right!"

XLIII.

Who weepeth now but Joachim the old,
With shame and joy, as, from her fear released,
His love again he doth in arms enfold!
Who singeth psalm but Chelcias the priest!
While all the city soundeth unto feast;
Nor recketh any of the traitors' meed,
Whose death-shrieks rouse the wild-fowl whence they feed.

XLIV.

So fair Susanna dwelt among her kin,
Much loved and honoured, till she passed away;
And great renown of wit did Daniel win,
Who lived the ruler of the East to sway;
And e'en the laws of Media gave way
To shape his ends, that never changed before.
Thus endeth all my tale, there is no more.

EXPLICIT.

UNDER THE DARK ARCHES.

DYING—yes, dying at last, thank God!
Here in the mud by the river,
And soon I shall be a senseless clod,
And the wind won't make me shiver,
Through the arches—*why, how the larches*
Bend in the breeze and quiver!

Is it milking-time yet, mother?
Why, what's this—mud and slime?
I thought for a minute I was some other,
It was some other time;
But the tide is rising, to hide and smother
Jenny, and life, and crime.

I suppose now up the court
There's laughter and fighting and fun,
Plenty of gin and plenty of sport,
And I wonder if any one

Thinks of me—they were never the sort
To think, and my thinking is done.

I'm glad it's so nearly all over,
It was such a weary life;
Now it was drink and living in clover,
And then it was starving and strife.
I wish there was something my face to cover—
I might have been Tom's true wife.

And yet I am not so old,
And I'm sure my heart was warm,
And it wasn't so much that I wanted gold,
Nor meant to do much harm,
But London streets are so dark and cold;
I wonder I left the farm!

* * * * *

He said I must leave my sin.
O God, was my sin so sweet!
Was it such a delight to roam the night
With a heart as sore as my feet,
And an aching head? but sin was my bread,
And even sinners must eat.

What's that face? is it hers
  Who met me drunk one day?
A black-hooded woman, with words so human
  I could not choose but stay,
And listen—her voice still murmurs and stirs,
  And it seems as if I could pray.

I wonder if he was right,
  Or she, or neither, it's queer:
There's sounds that gather that say *Our Father*
  Whispering-like in my ear—
Will I have brandy? no, gin, I'd rather—
  Good God! cold water—oh dear!

RINALDO TO ARMIDA.

I.

THY hair hath so blinded my sight, my dear,
Thy long dark hair,
That heaven no more seems bright or near;
I take no care
Though from the heights still beckons she
Whom men call Honour, I may not see;
Lo! in this plain is peace with thee,
And the upland peaks are bleak and bare.

II.

My soul is fulfilled with thy voice, my dear,
I may not know
If still the clarion soundeth clear
That wont to blow,
Low in the day and loud by night,
To tempt me on where the heroes fight:

Sing to me, fold me in arms of white,
Lying by thee in the sunflower row.

III.

One white hand hast thou laid on my heart,
Its pulse is stilled;
One on my lips, they only part,
As thou hast willed,
To kiss or to murmur thy sweet ~~name~~:
And what is this that men call Fame?
And what is this they speak of shame?
Love lives, and the elder gods hath killed!

THE LOVER TO HIS MARTYR-MISTRESS.

LAST night, Therése,
I groaned and clutched the pillows of my bed
For grief of dawnless days,
Of unaccomplished hopes, and pleasure fled;
And, ever brightening through the darkness, spread
A vision of a garden and green bays
Before mine aching eyes, and thy small head
I saw, and thy still face, through tear-raised haze,
Looked into mine, and all the silence dead
Took life with murmurous song, and thus it said,
Repeating that I heard in days gone by,
"Ask love no more. I have a spouse on high."

Therése, to-night
I lie with meek hands crossed upon my breast,
Dreaming of endless light,
Of consummation passing hope, of rest;

While all around me float the ever-blessed,
Scarce hidden by earth's veil from my shut eyes.
Steel cleaveth steel, and thou a joyous guest
At that great supper sittest in bride-wise;
The convent bars that prisoned up my prize
The sword hath cloven, and to these my sighs
A faint voice, small and sweet, makes sure reply,
"Ask what thou wilt; my Spouse will naught deny."

THE TRIUMPH OF LUCIFER.

(LUCIFER *loquitur.*)

FORTH from the gates of heaven, uncompelled,
Of my mere grace, I come; the mists dispelled
At my fair presence! Thou lone earth, long held
By might, know now thy lord: too long hast thou rebelled.

Behold, thou earth scarce waking from sad dreams,
How mildly in the gold-green heaven beams
Mine own sweet star, and how in all thy streams
She mirrors her, and say, what worship me beseems?

Oh, earth unwitting! am not I the light?
Bow down thyself, and give me now my right!
For, lo, I come to aid thee in my might;
Yield me my meed withheld by traitorous despite.

Night flies apace, and in this silent time,
When naught is heard except the subtle chime

Of those high spheres that tune with mystic rhyme
All things to order, bow before my face sublime!

What, O thou earth, to thee is that fell king
Who must come after me, awakening
Thee to much toil and labour? Lo, I sing
Of ease; be wise, enjoy what Lucifer doth bring.

I am fulfulling of thy heart's desire!
I the bringer of light, the lord of fire!
Answer me, all ye stars, mine own bright choir,
Is there a height whereto my spirit may not aspire?

CHORUS OF THE STARS.

Yea, Lucifer, thy triumph now begun
Must pause awhile,
When that all-wakening, toil-compelling sun
Doth rise, and smile
Upon the pleasant rolling of the waves
That tempt the sons of earth to hidden graves,
And on the fields wet with the tears of slaves,
On weariness and guile.

Yet rule, O prince! until the sun arise,
Rule thou the air.
On thee the voice of nature ever cries;
She fain would share
The splendour of thy state, nor seeks to aught
That may assail thy throne; thy ways are sought
By all on earth, and heaven's sons have caught
The shout that names thee fair.

O morning star, we hail thee as the king
Of heaven's powers!
The glory and the praise of all that sing
From heaven's towers:
Go forth all-conquering; as long as fame
Shall trumpet thee by that thy chiefest name,
Rule, O thou lord of fire, while thy bright flame
Illumines endless hours!

THE BURIAL OF ABEL.

SWEET Spring, the crocus through the meadow grass
Came up in sheets of purple flecked with gold,
The sorrow toned by hints of glory; larks
Went up to heaven to take news of earth,
How sweet it was for all the curse; the trees
Were putting on their ferial dress of green,
But chiefly the marsh willows; and in chief
The weeping willow, and the red round sun
Crept upwards through the silver morning mists,
Languid and weary, as the moist warm night
Had slain his strength that courts the northern wind.

An alder copse beside a running stream,
A small green patch of grass, long waving grass,
Blotted by one dull streak of earthy brown
That marked a trench, and kneeling in the copse
Two, and one lying—three, and one that spoke:

" Raise thou his head, mine Eve; his head hath lain
Upon thy bosom: let me bear those feet
Which first I taught to outstrip the mountain goat.
Thus let me make this first return to earth,
The mother from whose womb my being came;
And thou from me take this pre-eminence,
That as thou art of me, of me thou hast
The right to bear the head of the first-slain,
In token that of thee shall come the first
Whose slaying shall uncrown the slayer. Heel
Must smart ere head be crushed—to me the feet;
By man must all the weary work be done
By right of manhood, and by might of work
Must all the care be eased; so runs the doom.
Go, firstfruit of the sorrow, first to die!
Go, firstfruit of the promise, first to live!
There is no joy in leaving thee alone
Beneath the branches, there are forms of earth
That may invade thy body born of me,
Thy smooth brown body that still shows so fair,
And this thy golden hair may twine and cling
About the roots of flowers poisonous,
That wont to twine about thy mother's hands
At evening in our hut. But so thou sleep'st

Beneath the alder branches silently,
And never comest in the silent night
To vex thy mother with a wailing voice,
In peace I leave thee, and the rest to God.

Firstfruit of promise, is there any life
In which thou livest? Is there any tree
Will give me surety? For that fateful fruit
Hath given me all wisdom for the nones,
But what there may be hidden I know not;
The apple was of earth, and earthly lore
It gave me, and the knowledge of earth's ill
Came first, and I had some short taste of good
In clasping of my sons; but now the ill
Is only present, one I clip in vain
To woo his smiling, and ah, nevermore
My first-born!"

And the mother made reply:
"The fields shall not be green which thou hast ploughed
Before I greet him! Was it not his right
To quell his rival, though of kindred blood?
Ah me, my firstborn son, whose baby hands
First warmed my breast, though now that breast be cold

In dreams I feel him clutching at it still!
Thou lovedst not our Abel more than I,
I love our Cain, dost thou forget to love?
Abel is dead—so, lay him in the earth
Which shall be crimson with his blossoming;
Cain lives—and shall we add to that his curse
Another curse? Adam! thy heart is warm,
That never shrank from mine for all my sin,
It cannot cool to that firstfruit of pain,
My firstborn! Though the second son be dear,
Cain's kisses were the first upon my lips.
Look up into mine eyes, thou still dead face,
And answer me; is all thy mother's love
To pass into thy grave, and buried there
Lie like a seed in winter, bearing naught?
Shall it not rather, watered by my tears,
Spring to new life, that growing strong and fair
A healing plant may come of thee, a branch
Stretched forth by thy dead hand to greet him well
Who somewhere wrings remorseful hands for thee,
In token of thy pardon? Lo! the smile
That curves thy white lips answers me, 'tis well!"

Then awed by that strong love unreasoning,

Pure nature which no philosophic law
Might trouble with its subtleties, he bowed,
Red Adam bowed his head and kissed the feet;
As if in some half-guessed-at spirit form
The feet of murdered Abel might go forth,
Bearing to Cain their father's kiss of peace.

THE DEATH OF ALMACHILD.

SNOW white beneath the citron trees
The shining marble couches
Glassed globe and leaf; a little breeze
Was busy in the canopies,
And tinkled golden ouches
That held the scarlet to the frieze.

Outstretched at ease, each limb fulfilled
With sense of sleepy pleasure,
In idle strength lay Almachild,
Long, brown, and strong, a god in build,
A beast in spirit's measure,
As oxen lie by fields they tilled.

Through lids half shut he saw the green,
The red, the white, the yellow;
He heard the rustle of the screen,

He saw her stepping down, his queen,
His bride without a fellow,
Slow-stepping down with eyes serene—

Dark eyes that entered into his,
Like-hidden by dark lashes;
Through all his body thrilled the bliss
That, born of sudden loveliness,
Flames out in greyest ashes,
The love that cursed of Heaven is.

And she came round the balcony,
And she came down the stair,
All clad in purple royally,
And crowned with ivy, entered she,
And all her plum-blue hair
Rolled round her white neck gloriously.

Up started he all stark and glad,
Bewildered at that seeing,
He stood like Bacchus mute and mad
At sight of some much-loved Mænad;
A perfect pair in being
They seemed as ever earth hath had.

And she came on, and nearer on,
And knelt beside her master;
In her raised hands a beaker shone,
And she, as meek as any nun,
The while his breath came faster,
Spoke to the lord her craft had won.

"Behold, my lord, my life, my sweet!
How sparkle rising bubbles
Within this horn; the noontide heat
Is heavy on thee, it were meet
Thy wife should ease thy troubles,
So, Hebe, come I thee to greet.

"With wine to cherish, spice of Ind
To warm thee, winter's storing
To cool, and waft thy wandering mind
Back to those hills where nature kind
Still dwells, to rivers pouring
Through icy vaults sea-life to find

"Strong wine, and spice, and store of ice,
And bride that woos the winning,
I bring to thee, and nothing nice

I offer all at thy device;
I was not made for spinning,
In life of man my living lies."

So raught he out his trembling hands
To clutch the cup, and linger
About the shining ivy bands,
The while his strong life's golden sands
Ebbed out through eye and finger,
Dragged by the tide no moon commands.

He drank, and paused to see his bride,
No longer lowly kneeling,
Stand in the shade as one who spied
His face, from eyes dropped down to hide
The gleam of triumph stealing
To flushing cheek and lip's curled pride.

Snow-cold the draught, snow-cold and sweet,
But all his heart grew colder,
And all his brain took sudden heat;
As mountain cat had lent him feet,
He gripped her shining shoulder:
"Come, turn, my love! thy lord to greet.

" Enough for me, enough for thee,
Is mingled in thy beaker;
Ice for the vine of Lombardy—
Fire for the pine of Hungary—
And which of twain seems weaker,
The murdering vine or murdered tree?"

Then turned she with cold awful eyes,
And shook him off; she towered
Most like some Fate that destinies
Had swayed, and knew a Fate arise
To quell her, and he cowered,
So much her mouth did might despise.

With twofold hands above her head
She waved the horn, she kissed it,
She drained the draught, and stilly said,
"We twain have lived, and both are dead—
There was a life—I missed it!
What bitterer can be sung or said?"

Loud ringing on the shining floor
Came down the horn of sorrow;
He gazed on her, and, sighing sore,

"Oh, love! the dream of love is o'er!"
He said, "we wake to-morrow;
How hast thou squandered all our store!"

So falling, clasped her feet and kissed,
And died, and she his passion
Nor recked nor pitied, for the mist
Rose to her eyes, the fountain hissed
In ear; in queenly fashion
She wrapped her, fell, and no man wist.

A BALLAD OF KING HEROD'S DAUGHTER.

IN Jewry, God's first chosen land,
King Herod ruled and held command,
By Roman Cæsar's grace;
Full fierce he was, a haughty wight,
And of his hands a man of might,
As fitted Edom's race.

Now on a day within his hall
King Herod held high festival,
With many a knight and peer,
Because his birthday was to keep;
The laugh was loud, the draughts were deep,
Right royal was their cheer.

With ivy-wreaths each brow was bound,
And thick and fast the healths went round,
As madder grew their mirth;

The rough red wine loosed every tongue,
And loud King Herod's praise was rung,
They hailed him god on earth.

Then as the daylight waned apace
There came a goodly band in place,
Of maidens and of youth
Who claimed the king as sire and lord,
And came in duteous accord
To vow their love and truth.

And one brought vestiture of Ind,
And one brought carcanets to bind
The brows, and one brought myrrh ;
And this brought frankincense and spice,
And that one robes of quaint device,
Gold, sendal, pall, and fur.

And last of all a little maid
Knelt trembling down, as half afraid,
Before the dais place,
Fair Mariamne's youngest child,
And Herod's brow grew smooth and mild
For gazing on that face.

She bore a cloth of samite red,
Close wrapped, which being openèd,
She laid before the king
A wonder crown, no gems adorn
Its rim, but rays of sharpest thorn
Make up the royal ring.

Uprose her sire with wrath distressed,
"Forsooth, fair maid, a goodly jest!
What gift is this ye bring?
What! am I mocked in mine own hall
By thee, my favoured child of all,
Full loathly is this thing!"

And she right meekly answer made,
"No doubt upon my love be laid,
Nor on my gift no scorn;
Nor wealth of gold nor costly gem
Made ever noble diadem
As is this crown of thorn.

"For, lo, in Jewry on this day
A maiden on her breast shall lay
A Son, who shall be king;

And He no other crown shall wear
Than such an one as this I bear,
  Yet ruleth everything;

"Yea, ruleth earth and ruleth seas,
And cometh in no palaces;
  Yea, ruleth beast and man,
And hath not where to lay his head,
And of his subjects' hate is sped,
  And goeth for a span,

"And cometh back, and is not seen!
Was, is, and evermore hath been,
  Dead, and alive again.
And whoso would be king in truth
Shall not despise this crown of ruth,
  But of its girth be fain.

"And hear thou me, my lord and sire,
Nor set thine heart to scorn or ire;
  Full goodly is thy state,
But so thou cross that King in aught,
Thy force is weak, thy skill is naught,
  His might must thine abate."

Loud laughed King Herod scornfully,
"I ween, fair maiden, verily,
Thy wits are wandering!
Close cell and penance best may suit
Thy case, behold now what a fruit
Upon thy thorns doth spring!

"What ho! bear forth this crazy maid,
And be her limbs in darkness laid,
Let scourges try her will!
Perchance her boasted king shall come
To rule in Jewry and in Rome,
And loose her from this ill.

"But till he come, thou fool, believe
Thou shalt have goodly time to grieve
And cry for thy release,
And who shall aid? Whoso would wear
This torment should be debonnair,
A perfect prince of peace!

"Cry thou for champion to the stars,
And mourn behind thy prison bars
The day thou mockedst me!"

Full tight the gentle maid they bound,
And faster still the healths went round,
And wilder grew their glee.

And so they bore her off, and kept
In dungeon, where she lay and wept
Until her heart-strings cracked;
So died she in her early youth,
Whereof full many men had ruth,
And Herod's heart was racked.

For evermore her voice would sing
At midnight of that mighty King,
When silence ruled around;
And evermore must Herod weep
When others boune themselves to sleep,
For thinking on that stound.

Oh, crown most royal, crown most rare,
By King made precious past compare,
By Christ immortal worn!
God send us strength, and give us grace,
Despising pomp and pride of place,
To bow before the thorn.

A BALLAD OF ARIADNE DESOLATE.

I.

THE sails are set, the oars are fleet,
Ah me, my misery!
Across thy decks the air is sweet,
And I sit here in dull dead heat,
And, ever lessening, cheerily
The rowers' song comes mocking me,
And the long oars' slow steady beat.

II.

I laid my head beside thy knees,
Ah me, my misery!
And softer than the landward breeze
Thy sighs came o'er me, by degrees
They fanned the sense of day from me;
So comes his death who wearily
In vampire's cave lies stretched at ease.

III.

Then came thy red mouth on my lips,
Ah me, my misery!
Thy mouth as red as winter hips,
And on mine eyelids, and eclipse
Came to mine eyes, and thought went free
In lily fields to roam with thee,
And Fate stole nearer with her whips.

IV.

Alas, she smiteth, cruel Fate!
Ah me, my misery!
I woke to weep my lost estate,
To know my waking all too late,
To curse thy love, thy treachery,
To curse myself for cursing thee,
My heart disturbed with love and hate.

V.

I had a father old and grey,
Ah me, my misery!
He brooding sits the live-long day

To watch the bitter sunlight play
  Upon the waters mockingly,
  While, chattering shame of mine and me,
The white gulls sweep about the bay.

VI.

A silken ball, a silken clue
  Ah me, my misery!
I gave to guide thy footsteps through
The maze, I gave my heart so true,
  And by love's links thou leddest me;
  The silk was sure, and set thee free
To loose the links, and make me rue.

VII.

It had been better in the end
  Ah me, my misery!
If thou, false lover, fickle friend,
Hadst gone with nothing aid to lend
  But my white hand, and thee and me
  The beast had trampled bloodily,
That hand in hand our ghosts might wend.

VIII.

But on the turf my bones must bleach,
Ah me, my misery!
And thou, sea-slain, on some lone beach
Shalt whiten where the eagles screech,
And both shall want for Charon's fee,
And ever more imploringly
Vain hands of prayer to him shall reach.

IX.

Is this the end? Is this my gain?
Ah me, my misery!
On my green gown a blood-red stain,
In my red heart green wound of pain,
Life ebbing as the ebbing sea
From Phœbe's frown of chastity
Sinks, lost in the great outward main!

THE REVENGE OF THE MEN OF ARRAN.

I.

A CRY came in from Brodick,
Late on a summer's day,
How the English yoke that galled our folk
Was broken and cast away,
And their ships must be sought, ere morning broke,
That rode in Loch Ranza bay.

II.

There were twenty score of the crop-ears,
They had crushed us over-long:
We kept us still on moor and hill,
For we deemed them over-strong,
But weak arm strengthened to smite and kill
When they worked our women wrong.

III.

It was nine of a Lammas evening,
And the peaks were growing grey,
The plovers cried from the mountain-side
As we stealthily took our way,
Fifty, to wait where our foe must ride
On the road to Loch Ranza bay

IV.

Twenty among the bracken,
And twenty under the birks,
And ten on the hill, all crouching still,
With knives and scythes and dirks,
As hunters watch by the watering rill
'At night for the wild white stirks.

V.

A-jingling up from Sannox
We heard the bridles ring,
Ten in the heather we lay together,
Like cats that crouch for a spring:
Their corslets flashed from the stout buff leather
As they topped the rise full swing,

VI.

Galloping all together,—
And a roar rose up, and a cry,
As the great stones rolled, new torn from the mould,
On that fated company:
When the forty gathered, the pass to hold,
There were barely a score to die.

VII.

We held the pass till morning,
But the curse was clean away;
Our hidden guest, the priest, he blessed
Our land at the break of day,
As we watched their fleet that fled to the West,
And the light on Loch Ranza bay.

VIII.

There's gathering on Tornidneoŋ,
There's feasting up the glen;
The corbies skirl, and the eagles swirl,
And the wild cat creeps from her den,
At the call of the waters that sea-ward whirl
The last of the crop-eared men.

LADY GRIZEL'S COURAGE.

NOW word has gone to the fair Tweedside,
And word into the Merse,
That the good old lord is foul descried,
And the cause is lost, and his work espied,
The truth comes by the worse—

But Lady Grizel she rose by night,
Said, "I am a maiden weak,
Yet will I seek to aid the right,
And save my sire,—what need for flight
When help is sure to seek?

"I have a lover in Carlisle town,
An old man good and true,
And I will go and cast me down
Before his feet,—he sways the crown,
And on me will he rue.

"I could not give him love nor troth,
But he is true and strong,
And his lost love he were full loath
Should suffer scaith,—he would be wroth
My father brooked this wrong!"

She clad her in kirtle, swift to ride,
She went by a secret way,
She patted the grey mare on the side,
And shook her oats in the sieve so wide,
That she should not whinny or neigh.

As she went out of the peel-house fold
The stars were shining bright;
She took no thought of wet nor cold,
But forth she went all calm and bold
Along the summer night.

As she rode over the Wasterigg Fell
The bents were growing white,
The shadows lay on holt and dell,
But waking birds began to tell
Of day that wakened bright.

When up there started, bold and stark,
A man that barred her way;
Against the dawn his helm was dark,
Her straining ear his voice must hark,
That bade her halt and stay.

"Now who art thou, thou robber bold?
And whereto boots my staying?
Forsooth I bear with me no gold,
Too poor, alas, I ride the wold,
Nor grants my cause delaying!

"If ever ye came of a father good,
Or ever of mother true,
I charge you by my maidenhood,
By father, and truth, and Holy Rood,
Ye spare me, when I sue.

"For I have a father in fair Tweedside,
And my father's head is lost,
Unless to Carlisle town I ride
Before the noon, all unespied.
Be man,—nor count the cost!"

"What need, what need now, lady?" he said,
"To cry with so much care?
Though Carlisle town were worth my head,
Your seeking should be surely sped,
The surer shall you fare!

"For I have a steed of sorrel red
May mate with your dapple grey,
Lies hidden here in a bracken bed,
Shall pilot you withouten dread
To Carlisle ere the day!"

They rode and they rode, and the daylight grew,
And the light came back to the flowers,
The sorrel and grey together they flew,
Till rose against the cold pale blue
The black of Carlisle towers.

Whereat he turned in silent mood,
And said, "God speed ye well!"
Such is the might of maidenhood,
That even lions hath subdued,
As olden makers tell.

THE DRINKERS OF MUNSTER.

THERE were three jovial drinkers,
All on St. Lucy's day,
In Munster town they settled them down
To tipple the night away.

With cups to count the quarters,
While mazers measured the hour,
A brimming bowl for every toll
That pealed from the belfry tower.

They drank, and slandered woman,
And each claimed perfect wife,
And all were agreed in discussing the Creed,
And death and the future life.

At last, when the beakers' number
Was 'minished from twelve to one,
In a pause of the toasting they fell to boasting
Of marvellous exploits done:

Of fights with six and a dozen,
And perils by field and flood;
Quoth one bold braggart, "Alone, no laggart,
I challenge all flesh and blood!"

Then up and spoke his fellow,
And "I am your lord," said he;
"Nor man, nor elf, nor the devil himself
Shall challenge or daunton me!"

With that a smouldering ember
He plucked from the hearth, and drew,
With drunken jape, on the wall a shape—
And the belfry bell tolled two.

Then each with a twin measure
They clattered the swimming board,
And hailed as the devil that shape of evil
To whom their wine was poured,

With "Hail, thou strong Sir Satan!
Our morning draught, come bless it!"
The figure bowed as their plea were allowed,
And the light burnt blue in the cresset,

"All hail, thou flame-parched Satan!
Come, cool thee with a brimmer:"
The figure turned, and its eyeballs burned,
And the lamps grew dim and dimmer.

"The fiend for a boon companion,
Be fear of his dwelling banished!"
They stayed to quaff at a grisly laugh,
As the lights flared up and vanished.

* * * * *

The hangman lone who dwelleth
Where swamps the city bound,
That slave of sorrow, on Lucy's morrow
He walked the gibbet round.

He saw three strangled corpses
Where never his hand had come,
Each grasped a bottle, and each one's throttle
Was seared with a swarthy thumb.

THE CYGNET'S STORY.

DOWN where the river spreads to its widest reach
Is an eyot of trees,
A line of poplar and alders and one big beech,
And under these
Willow weed tall as a man, like a ripening peach,
And up to the knees
Wades in the stream a willow whose long locks bleach
To the questing breeze.

Whenever I passed thereby, or late or soon,
It shivered and wept,
When midges danced in the sun, when sunk from the moon
The lilies slept,
I wondered why; so at last on an afternoon
Through the reeds I crept,

Lay at its side, and said, "Old willow, a boon!"
Then a troutling leapt;

But I could not mind the trout just then: I said,
"Old mournful tree,
Why do you tremble so and hang your head?
Come, tell to me!
Is it for trouble that comes, or bygone dread?"
Then answered he,
"Alack, for the bonnie buckwheat burnt and dead,
Was bright of blee!

"It grew in a field close by on the further side,
All blue and bright,
And high for joy of its beauty waxed its pride,
Whence came the blight;
For when the storm bolts opened the portals wide
To show heaven's light,
The buckwheat scorned as others its head to hide,
And waved upright.

"For when the lightning flashes the skies divide
Is heaven laid bare,

That the awful face of the Father might be descried
Who sitteth there,
If one might gaze, but all their faces hide
From that dread glare:
And 'Bow yourselves, mad grasses!' loud I cried.
'What will ye dare?'

"But the buckwheat said, 'Behold, as the eyes of God
Are the buds we bear;
Nought like them swings on bough or springs from sod,
All may we dare!
Even the Judge would spare to smite with His rod
A thing so fair:
So will we, gazing on heaven when storms are abroad,
See what is there.'

"The skies grew blacker and blacker, and zigzags blue
The blackness crossed;
Once, as I bent in haste, I caught a view
Where blue buds tossed
In wanton pride, and a fall must come, I knew.
I said, 'They are lost!'
I trembling peered all night the darkness through,
With a heart like frost.

"The morning came, all sunny and fresh: alack!
In the beaten field
The buckwheat lay all broken and scorched and black
Its fate was sealed.
And this is why I evermore bow my back,
And pity I yield
For that bright bloom all gone to sorrowful wrack,
And loss of the weald."

Ceased the old willow and bent in the wave to look
With its branches grey:
It would not answer again, so my wings I shook,
And I stole away
To talk to the chattering mill-wheel up the brook
That is always gay:
But the willow weeps on its shady island nook
By night and day.

THE MIRACLE OF THE CHRISTMAS THORN.

I.

THERE were three silly shepherds,
For warmth they clung together,
And for howling of the leopards,
'Mid ewe and lamb and wether:
They watched beside their sheep,
And they sang to ward the sleep,
As they lay beneath the hawthorn in the winter night.

II.

The bush was bare and sapless,
The sky was dark and spangled,
The earth around lay hapless
By net of frost entangled:
The thorn as they lay under
They spied a sudden wonder,
For the dry bush burgeoned in the winter night.

III.

Aye, all the twigs grew tender
With sudden green, and flowers
Broke out as if to render
Their winter-holt spring-bowers:—
There came a sudden singing,
And a sudden noise of winging,
As the thorn broke into blossom in the winter night.

IV.

"All peace to peaceful livers,"
The angels sang around them,
Of giving to the givers,
And snap of cords that bound them,
Of a child that lay in manger,
Of a royal unknown stranger,
Of life that raised dead nature in the winter night.

V.

Oh, flower of utmost purity,
Oh, sweetness past the telling,
Oh, red drops at maturity
From wounded heart outwelling,

The which the points have torn
Of the bitter barren thorn,
That broke into his blossoming that winter night.

VI.

Good Joseph from that bower
He cut a staff to stay him,
Which yet doth bud and flower
Where British men did lay him;
In the West you still may see
Where the hallowed Eastern tree
Grows green and white at Christmas on the very
Christmas night.

THE GABRIEL BELL.

HUON the knight, when his armour bright
Grew heavy on arm, he took his flight,
Staff in hand, to a lonesome land,
In hermit's dwelling he took his stand:
Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

All in the swamp, where the mists lie damp,
And the lapwings light for the worms to stamp,
Built him a cell wherein to dwell,
Set in the turret an evening bell.
Naught of ill may abide the swell

Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

Who must stray that lonesome way
Were best to shrive him clean and pray;
As daylight dies, the mist wreaths rise
To mock the sight in angel's guise:
Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

Each holds up a seeming cup
For lips of the weary lost to sup;
Only a breath that giveth death
Greets the lips from the swamp beneath.

Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

Foot will sink, and shoe will drink
The black moss-water, eye will blink,
Breath will stop, and strong arm drop,—
Where grows no grass, Death reaps his crop:
Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

Unless the light from turret's height
Send forth a narrow streak and bright,
Unless there float the saving note
The bell with use hath gotten by rote

Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

Fast it swings, and wanderer clings
To hope, and Mary hears where rings
The Gabriel bell, and mists of hell
Sink at her praying, and all is well.
Naught of ill may abide the swell
Of the old Knight-hermit's Gabriel bell,
Bead-roll of notes that thus doth tell:
Hail Mary! full of grace,
Blest art thou in every place:
Hail Mary! Mother-may,
God is with thee, for us pray!

A GREEK GIRL'S HYMN TO HOMER.

WITH roses and with bays, bright as thy fame,
Green as thy memory,
I crown thee, Bard, whom seven cities claim
As having nurtured thee:
Thou on whom Heaven's ray
Shone so, that to earth's day
Thine eyes were blind,
Because thy soul was rapt into the vision
Of things Elysian,
I crown thee, poet, for all womankind!

And first for Helen—fools may scoff and sneer,
Thou knew'st she wept her fill.
Torn from her land, her lord, from all held dear,
Yet stately sweeping still
Across that magic stage
Thou buildest with thy page,
With sweet wan face;

Too proud to own her tears, too sweet to ban
Who first her curse began,
Stern, sweet, and sharp, and tender,—as her race.

And next for Briseis—fair, mournful maid;
The heroes bearing her
From those strong arms where she at rest was laid,
She went with no demur
Into his tent's red gloom
Who to its living tomb
Had, lustful, dragged her life,
And knew her own love weeping in despair,
Yet would not share
Such peace as worked her people deadly strife

And last for her, the fair barbarian,
The true Andromache,
Worthy a lover in whose veins there ran
The blood of Hellas free!
Ah, poet, in that grove
Where blissful thou dost rove,
And greetest those
Whom thou didst sing; was ever truer lover
Than who doth cover
Thy solemn brow with bays and royal rose?

A SONG OF THE FATES.

BLOOD and fire, and wine, and tears,
Twirl the spindle, ply the shears,
Swift the wheel is turning;
How goes on the midmost thread?
Milk-white—golden hued—blood red:
Troy town lies a-burning.

CLOTHO.

I from out the silence black
Spin the threads all pale and slack,
And I know not what ye lack
To a perfect weaving;
Yet your silence doth me wrong—
Silent thou with fingers strong
Passest twinèd strands along
For her silent cleaving.

LACHESIS.

Surely goes the tightening twist
Through my hands, or loathe or list,
Every strand my lips have kissed,
  Pressed have my long fingers:
Still I weave the threads so raw,
From my lips strange hues they draw,
Fingers light on knot and flaw,
  Yet my hand ne'er lingers.

ATROPOS.

Blood, and fire, and tears, and wine
Mingle in this jar of mine,
Fire that flashes through the brine,
  Brine that brightens burning;
Fire that flashes off the shears,
Scorching severed threads, and tears
Quenching hopes, and wine the fears,
  Blood the heart's old yearning.

Blood, and fire, and wine, and tears,
Twirl the spindle, ply the shears,

Swift the wheel is turning;
How goes on the midmost thread?
Milk white—golden hued—blood red:
Troy town lies a-burning.

VÆ VICTIS.

I.

"CALL me no longer merciless!
Truce for a month of days
I offer you; armed scouts shall cease
To scour unguarded ways,
Nor dam shall weep for lamb's torn fleece,
Nor fenceless homestead blaze.

II.

"Hear then my terms of truce!
I give you rest—no more;
Nor grain, nor beast, nor vineyard's juice
Must plenish your wasting store:
Then rest and revel as was your use
In the happy days of yore.

III.

"What! scorn my terms, ye wittols!
'Tis but the giving up
Of the poor man's one-meal victuals,
Their cates who daintily sup,
The oil and milk of the 'spitals,
And the wine of the chalice cup!

IV.

"When soldier staggers where he stands,
And beggar asks no boons,
Thirst-mute,—when chafing tiny hands,
'Neath bitter winter moons,
Fair women crouch by quenchèd brands,
When nun at altar swoons,—

V.

"Then open wide your gates
To take me in, your guest,
Who would have stayed the Fates
To give you revel and rest,
All uninvited though I come
To pierce the beaten breast."

VI.

Alas, alas! fair city!
  Lie still, and suffer thy dole,
Look not for aid nor pity,
  Sweet France, be strong of soul!
Be strong of soul and firm of hand,
There is none will help, and the end is planned:
Die like a queen then, calm and grand;
  There is none other goal!

NOW AND THEN.

OH! for the days of life's beginning,
When sleep was rest, and gain was winning,
And joy was Nature's daily dole;
When balm of tears healed all our losses,
And golden-chain and Whitsun-bosses
Were treasure enough for the simple soul!

It seems we cannot backwards wander;
We turn us back to dream and ponder,
But some grim shadow steps between;
Holds up a veil that dims and brightens,
That shadows all ourself, and lightens
The past path where our steps have been—

A veil of cloud and fire: the clouding
Is on our day, our sunlight shrouding,
And on the past night of our dreams
Lost light of heaven sleeps unfading:—

Pass we along, our worn eyes shading
From where too bright the glory streams.

Oh! sleep and waking, night and morning!
Is knowledge bliss? Hath Nature scorning
Because sweet Nature walks undressed?
We learn the knowledge of our sorrow,
One garb to-day—a new to-morrow,
And wander on, still seeking rest!

LIFE'S LIGHTS.

HE hath set in His heaven two lights,
Our Father on whom we cry,
For all the days have their nights,
And each hath his hour to die;
These are the moon and the sun of life,
That brace men's hearts for the daily strife.

Our God hath given us sleep,
And given us surety of death,
To close the eyes that weep,
To ease the labouring breath;
Our God hath given these two great gifts,
To shed their light through the black cloud-rifts.

He gave us sleep at the first,
Ere bliss had any alloy,
Ere this sweet earth was curst;
For man grew faint with joy,

And the night breeze wooed his heart to rest
As the red moon dipped in the mellow west.

And when man learned to mourn
The dear God gave him death,
That each might look to a bourne,
And each might hope for a wreath,
A cool green wreath to bind his brows
So aching and hot with the world's carouse;

A sun to dispel the mists
That cumber the vale of life,
To shine on the weary lists
Where all night long in strife
The sons of God with fiends have striven,
When the life-long cloud by its light is riven.

Some of us conquerors crowned,
Some forfoughten and sore,
Some of us beaten and bound,
Some who can strive no more;
Surely we all shall feast at last
In our Father's house, when the night is past.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY.

I.

EYES are too weak for gazing on the sun,
But where there run
Across the sea a myriad sparkling motes,
Or where there floats
Deep down in a still pool his image clear,
Eyes watch and peer,
Looking on orb and beam without or scathe or fear.

II.

Ears are too dull for hearing of those strains
Whereby there reigns
Set order in each ever-moving sphere;
But when, drawn near,
The lark comes back from skyward wanderings
New notes he sings,
And man hears echoes faint of strange and unknown things.

III.

Hearts are too faint for faith; the sound of words
Scant aid affords,
The weary soul therein finds little meaning,
Asks stronger leaning;
But feeling how this earth is sweet and fair,
Voided of care,
The heart of man leaps up in strong unspoken prayer.

ANGLING.

UNDER a spreading tree
They rested, he and she;
The brooklet with a wrangle
Complained of those rough rebels
That let its course, the pebbles;
And they—they came to angle.

And he must clear her line,
While she a net doth twine,
His fancy to entangle,
With mesh of maiden hair;
She knows herself so fair
She hardly needs to angle.

Maybe there comes a knot,
As comes in many a lot,
E'en marriage bells will jangle!

Anon the line runs clear,
He thinks 'Wert thou my dear!'
And still she sits to angle.

Ah, fools, or men, or fish!
Each for the bait must wish
That doth before them dangle;
And, for they are so fain,
Too often both are slain
By one who sits to angle!

TO SOLITUDE.

I.

FIRST of created powers!
Before the eldest born of all archangels
First lifted lids from bright eyes and surprised;
Half conscious how their gleaming told evangels
To some far time, unknown, yet part surmised,—
Fenced in from space by heaven's golden towers,
Wrapped in the silence of eternal bowers,
Thou sattest at the feet of the All-Father,
And gazing in His steadfast face didst gather
Thyself a dower,
Knowledge, and might, and quietude sublime
Above all quiet, and a healing power
To soothe all hurt of soul to endless time.

II.

Cast forth from that high dwelling,
Shut from the Father's face,

Most sorrowfully free
In prisoned liberty,
Thou rangedst all the hollow realms of space:
But chiefly where the sullen waters swelling
Possessed dim chaos was thy resting place,
And from that leaden sea
To mourn most dismally
Thy voice hath learned; and thou hast learned to sing
From stray sweet sounds, that reached thee in the void,
Of distant harps and voices;—unalloyed
By jar of earth are those thy songs,
Full of forgetfulness and ease of wrongs,
Low as the throstle lulling new-born spring.
And gazing still as thou didst range
The vault of teeming nothingness, thine eyes
Grew deep and pregnant with great certainties,
Thy face possessed the calm that to sure hope belongs—
Sure hope, and full belief in some sweet coming change.

III.

Then when the forest walls were set
Around the garden,

From finished earth thy steps were let,
For all the green earth was beset
With ward and warden;
The thickets were ringing with bridal mirth,
And legions of spirits were treading the earth,
And thou fleddest again to outer space,
With a calm delight on thy pensive face
For musing upon the bliss that waited the coming race.

IV.

Then first a voice
Broke in upon thy musing, with a tale
That bid thee wail
For wilful choice,
And sorrowful long wandering, and hate,
And wild debate,
That called thee back thy wondering seat to take
Within the depths of that twin-altared brake,
And watch beside his sleep who never more should wake;
To chase his tottering steps whose hurried feet
Sought safety from the working of his hand,
And whisper in his ear how that red brand,

Smoking and blood-bedabbled, aye must greet
Each eye that evermore his awful face should meet.
So grew a horror in thine eyes,
A look of listening for some sad surprise,
And thou didst learn to bid the dirge arise;
Wringing of hands and beating of the breast
Thou learnedst, to the ending of thy rest.

v.

Ah! Solitude,
My whilom wooer or in sun or shade!
With terror now imbued
How comest thou to make my heart afraid!
Why do thine eyes that wont to cheer upbraid?
This greeting cold and rude
Is it a fitting speech 'twixt thee and me?
Have I not fostered thee?
Lo, in all love I bid thee to my board,
Called thee to bear me fellowship in way,
As heretofore, through many a changing day;
And in the wine some venom thou hast poured,
That numbs my heart
And bids my pulses stay,

And thou hast sprinkled ashes on my bread,
And goest ever with a covered head;
And better that apart
I had remained with such as thwarted choice,
For though the talk were bold, sweet was the voice;
And thou but chidest now,
Or else with clouded brow
Goest in silence, when I would rejoice,
Thou who didst soothe and spur with hymn and pæan,
Woe for thy shape Protean!

VI.

Bethink thee of that time
Wherein through heat or rime
We went together, fellows to the end;
For so of thee I deemed,
An angel as it seemed
Dwelt with me, likened to a stalwart friend.
Upon thy faithful breast
My weary head might rest,
Thine arm around me was full firm and strong;

Thou knewest all my wrongs,
For thee I kept my songs,
I told thee all the secrets that belong
To every living heart,
Its own, for aye apart;
The quaint delights that never any tells
To any mortal wight,
Because to sense and sight
They come in such a sort, no language spells
The meaning of the story of the breeze,
The meaning of the light upon the leas,
The flower's bend, wave's hiss and swallow's sweep,
The little beasts that bustle and that creep.
And thou to me from out thine early lore
Didst bring of heaven's stories such a store
As kept me quiet for much listening;
And thou hadst tales of shepherd, warrior, king,
Full of sad joy and pleasant shuddering;
But now with stone-cold eyes
Thou pratest of mine own dull agonies;
Are they not known too bitterly?
I sought not sermons, but some sympathy
And lessoning from thee!

VII.

Hence ! for I seek the world again,
The human world takes heed of sorrow ;
Go thou, and dwell awhile with pain,
And haply thou shalt healing borrow
From sorrow's bitter drinks,
For thou art sick, methinks,
With over-quaffing of the sweets of pleasure.
Heal thee, sweet Solitude ! and come to me
Clear-eyed again, and it may chance that we
Shall be alone, and all thine ancient treasure
Thou shalt remember and recover,
And once again with thy true lover
Walk through all weathers in song-sweetened leisure.

POEMS PUBLISHED IN 1865.

ST. DOROTHEA.

THE sun blazed fiercely out of cloudless blue,
And the deep sea flung back the glare again
As though there were indeed another sun
Within the mimic sky reflected there;
Not steadily and straight as from above,
But all athwart the little rippling waves
The broken daybeams sparkling leapt aloft
In glittering ruin; scarce a breath of air
To stir the waters or to wave the trees;
The flowers hung drooping, and the leaves lay close
Against their branches as if sick and faint
With the dull heat, and needing strong support.
The city walls, the stones of every street,
The houses glowed, you would have thought that none
Would venture forth till that the gracious night
Should come with sable robe and wrap the earth
In softest folds, and shade men from the day.
But see, from every street the seething crowd

Pour out, and all along the way they stand,
And ribald song and jest resounds aloud,
And light accost and careless revelry;
What means this? wherefore flock the people forth?
Ceases the hum, a sudden silence falls
On all around; the tramp of armèd men
Rings through the air; and hark! what further sound?
A girl's fresh voice, a sad sweet song is heard
Above the clank of arms, men hold their breath.
Yet not all sadness is that wondrous chant,
That hushes the wild crowd with sudden awe;
As when the nightingale's mellifluous tones
Rise in the woodland, ere the other birds
Have ceased their vesper hymn, that moment drops
Each fluttering songster's wild thanksgiving lay,
So for awhile did silence fall on all
Within the seething crowd at that sweet voice.
She comes; they bring her forth to die, for she
This day must win the martyr's palm, this day
Must witness for her faith, this day must reap
The fruit of all her pains, long rest in heaven.
Long had they spared her, for the governor
Was loth that she should suffer, and her race
Was noble, so they hoped to make her yield,

And waited still and waited; but at length
They grew enraged at her calm steadfastness,
They knew not whence a resolution such
As made a young maid baffle aged men;
So she must die.

Now as she went along
'Midst all her guards, again burst forth the mob
Into such bitter taunts, such foul wild words
As sent the hot blood mantling to her cheek
For shame that she, a maid, must hear such things;
And yet was no remorse within their hearts,
No light of pity in their savage eyes;
Like hungry wolves that scent the blood from far
They howled with joy, expectant of their prey.
There was one there, he in old days had loved
Her fair young face, but he too now, with scorn
Written in his dark eyes and on his brow
And in the curl of his short lip, stood by;
It seemed not such a face, that bitter smile,
For he was passing fair, in youth's heyday.
But if contemptuous was his mien, his words
Were worse for her to bear, for he cried out,—
He whom her heart yet owned its only love,

He, whom she held first of all living men,
He, whom she honoured yet, though left by him
In her distress and danger—this man cried,
"Ho, Dorothea! doth the bridegroom wait?
And goest thou to his arms? joy go with thee!
But yet when in his palace courts above,
Whereof thou tellest, fair one, think on us
Who toil in this sad world below, on me
Think thou before all others, thine old love,
And send me somewhat for a token; send
Of that same heavenly fruit and of those flowers
That fade not!"

Then she turned and answered him,
"As thou hast said, so be it; thy request
Is granted!" and she passed on to her death.
She died; her soul was rapt into the skies;
The vulgar horde who watched her torture knew
Nought of the great unfathomable bliss
Which waited her; and when her spirit fled,
None saw the angel bands receive her, none
Heard the long jubilant sweet sound that burst
Through heaven's high gates, swept from ten thousand
harps

By seraph choirs, for she had died on earth
Only to enter on her life above.

Night fell upon the earth; the city lay
Slumbering in cool repose, the restless sea,
Weary with dancing all day 'neath the sun,
Was hushed to sleep by the faint whispering breeze
That, wanting force to sport, but rose and fell
With soothing murmur like to pine boughs stirred
By the north wind; sleep held men's eyelids close.
And he, that youth, slept, aye! slept peacefully,
Nor recked of the vile insult he had poured
Upon the head of one whom once he swore
To love beyond all others. As he lay
Wrapped in the dreamless slumber of young health,
Sudden a light unearthly clear hath filled
His chamber, and he starts up from his couch,
Gazing in troubled wonder; by his side
What sees he? a young boy he deems him first,
But when had mortal such a calm pure smile
Since our first father lost his purity?
A radiant angel rather should he be
Who stands all glorious, bearing in his hands
Such fruit and flowers as surely never grew

On this dull earth; their fragrance filled the air
And smote the senses of Theophilus,
That a sad yearning rose within his heart,
Such as at times a strain of song will raise,
Or some chance word will bring (we know not why)
Flooding the inmost soul with that strange sense,
Half pain, half pleasure, of some bygone time,
Some far-off and forgotten happiness,
We know not where nor what.

The stranger spoke,
And thus he said, "Rise up, Theophilus!
And take these gifts which I from heaven bring.
Fair Dorothea, mindful of her words,
Hath sent thee these, and bids thee that henceforth
Thou scoff not but believe!"

With those same words
Vanished the cherub, and the room was dark,
Save where the moonbeams made uncertain light,
And where remained those blossoms and that fruit,
For from each leaf and stem there streamed a ray
As of the morning.

Down upon his couch
Theophilus sank prone, with awe oppressed,
But for a moment; starting wildly up,
He cried, "My love! my Dorothea, list!
If thou canst hear me in those starry halls
Where now thou dwellest, I accept thy gift,
Do thou take mine, for I do give myself
Up to the service of thy Lord; thy faith
Shall from this hour be mine, for I believe!"

FORSAKEN.

THE moments are fleeting, fleeting,
Like leaves in the autumn wind,
Swift as my heart's wild beating,
Yet thou art still unkind!
I watch, but thou drawest not nigh me,
Ah! cruel as thou art fair!
Laughing the stream runs by me,
And mocks at my soul's despair!

My heart is breaking, breaking,
Alas, love, why must I die?
A bitter revenge thou art taking
That I wearied thine ear with my sigh!
Yet kill me not, sweet, with sorrow,
Waft me but one soft kiss,
And the sun that shall rise to-morrow
Shall see me lie slain with bliss!

SONNET.

ON heaven's steps of beryl, poised for flight,
An angel stood; but ere his wings he spread
Close to his side did his twin angel light,
Who from the darkening earth had newly sped;
Thy guardian spirit, seeing that thy head
Was bent in prayer, so knew thee safe from harm,
Homesick to heaven awhile he quickly fled,
Longing for native peace and love and calm.
So spake each angel of his human charge,
Telling of hopes and fears, of joy and woe,
Then parting, he who left the shining marge
To watch o'er me, his care, swift sped below,
And as I slept, he in my sleeping ear
Whispered of thee, and straight I dreamt thee near.

TENDER AND TRUE.

REBECK'S gay tinkle, sweet complaint of flutes,
And silver shower of water-sounding tones
Pressed from the outstretched cords by harper hands,
All night made music in the grim old hall.
Nor these alone, for ladies' voices sweet,
So sweet the mellow flutes seemed harsh as daws,
And laughter clear and low, more musical,
More liquid than the sound of harp or lute,
Rippled against the roof and round the walls.
Gloomy and stern the monastery stood
In fair St. Johnstoun, and the friars black
Were known as kindly open-handed men,
Who freely gave to whosoever lacked,
Having large revenues and larger hearts.
Now sounds of wassail and of merriment
Scared the staid echoes of the ancient pile,
King James of Stewart's line held court therein.
Loud was the revel through the evening hours,

At length the feast was done; the monarch stood
The only man within the convent hall,
Beside him fair Joanna, while around
Her maidens bloomed, high-born and comely all;
All fair, but one as far excelled the rest
As the queen rose outshines the simple buds,
Her beauty made their loveliness seem naught.
Go! bind with other flowers the heliotrope
And straight they wither; simple shows the bloom,
Innocent, starlike, yet 'tis murderous,
Nor brooks a rival's presence, so they die.
Thus Catherine's beauty claimed pre-eminence,
O'erruled and slew the charms of all her mates,
As sunlight quenches tapers' feeble gleam.
Long were the task, and all too weak are words,
And powerless, to paint the smiling face
That looked from out a frame of curls that shone
Like chestnuts tangled in a mesh of gold;
The lustre of the ever-laughing eyes
Which from the wild forget-me-not had stolen
Hue, dewy brilliancy and attributes:
A lovely gleeful face, yet in the brow,
And in the lines about the delicate mouth,
Might you descry a strength, a hidden power

Unknown to all, it might be to herself,
That spoke a woman who, if cause there were,
Could rise to deeds of might, could do and die
As fitted one who came of Douglas' line.

The king, the fated king, he stands and jests,
While, snowy hands upon his shoulder clasped,
Joanna gazes upwards in his face
And laughs, because he laughs, her lord and love.
Secure they deemed themselves, when from below
There rose a murmuring sound, a vengeful shout,
A clash of weapons, and the oriel
Flashed from its darkness into ruddy light
As tossed the torches in the abbey court.
As startled deer when first the thunder rolls
Crowd all together, so they huddled there
In breathless listening terror round the king,
The maidens all, waiting they knew not what.
Far off they heard the city tocsin clash,
But nearer, ever nearer, came the cry,
Then first the queen found words, and sobbing spoke,
"They seek thy life, mine own, they seek thy life!
I hear the shout of 'Athole' at the gates,
And 'Grahame'! and here are none to give thee aid

We are but women, what can women do?
Shelter thee in our arms a little while,
Then die beside thee!"

Out spoke Catherine;
The fire was in her eyes, the Douglas blood
Was flushing in her cheek, and thus she said:
"Though we be women, yet these knaves shall learn
So great a power hath truth o'er falsity
That even a woman, let her but be true,
Can foil the greatest lord who e'er wore graith,
If a false heart be hidden in his breast.
Rouse thee, my liege! arise for Scotland's sake!
For the queen's sake! and hear: beneath this hall
Yawns a dark vault; full well I know the place,
For sporting yesterday we raised the trap
And saw the hollow blackness spread beneath;
Through one low arch alone came any light,
And with the light came laughter, merry cries,
And sound of bounding balls—the tennis court!
The tennis court! it opens to the town,
St. Johnstoun's burghers all are loyal folk.
Go down, I prithee, sire, and thus escape!"
Uprose the plank, drawn up by lily hands,

With dumb blank horror stricken stood the king;
Then, as they drew him forward to the hole,
Cold struck the damp air upwards in his face
As though he stooped above an open grave.
Still, as he wavered, Catherine urgently
Cried, "Go, my liege! O madam, bid him go!"
Yet did he linger. Then Joanna came;
Pressing his hand against her hueless lips,
She prayed him for the love of her, his wife,
For love of all his children, he would go,
So that he yielded. Loth was he to part;
The coward dread for self that shamed him first
Had left his heart, and now for her he feared,
Her and her maidens; still she pressed him sore
Until he thought, "They seek my life, not hers;"
Then with one agonizing last embrace
Stepped to the vault, and dropped, and Catherine cried,
'They come! quick, quick! the plank! I bar the door."
A moment listening by the door she stood,
Then stooped and groped around, and rose again
With a sick misery in her blue eyes,
And haggard lines upon her working face,

Muttering, "The bar is gone, and all is lost!"
Bewildered, terrified, she only thought
Of safety for the king, and not to shock
The other weaker women with the news,
So stood irresolute: and up the stair
Tramped loud the sound of arms and weapon clash,
While ever whooped the Grahame amidst the din,
Hounding his bandogs on the royal hart.
On Catherine's face there came a sterner look,
A wild smile faintly flickered o'er her lips,
High thoughts and worthy of a noble soul
Were rising in her heart; she bared her arm,
Her right round arm, her soft blue-veinèd arm,
And thrust it through the staples of the door.
Joanna and her maidens saw her there,
But they with terror dazed, or marked her not,
Or, looking through the dim hall, only saw
Catherine listening still behind the door,
A momentary hush without, a pause,
As if the traitors having reached the goal
Drew back from finishing their coward work,
Fearing the ghastly end now fully seen.
Oh! the cold shiver that then shook their hearts
Who crouched against the fireplace of the hall,

So being farthest from the leaguered door;
Oh ! the dumb agony, the high intent,
The courage, and the natural woman's dread,
That strove for mastery of her heaving breast
Who stood unflinching, with her slender arm
Thrust through the iron staples of the door.
There came a yell, a rush of many feet,
A sound of bursting wood, one stifled wail—
In swarmed the foe; some saw an awful face,
Rigid and beautiful, and crossed themselves,
For fateful seemed the wide and glittering eyes,
The stricken horror of the stony gaze;
Those who looked twice saw it was but a girl
Wrapped closely in her cloak who fronted them,
No spirit, only an affrighted girl.
She sate her down upon the chamber floor,
And crouched there, closely wrapped within her cloak,
Hiding the ghastly thing was late her arm;
She watched in pride exulting as they searched,
And, as the baffled faces met her view,
Scornfully laughed a laugh was half a shriek;
Yet still to watch the upshot she endured.
The many feet tramped down the creaking stair
Unwillingly, the maidens raised their heads,

Looking around and whispering, "We are safe!"
Catherine heard and moaned, "I will not die
Till they are gone, until the king is safe,
Until they tell me he is safe indeed!"
Enduring thus she listened, till a shout
Rang through the outer hall, the foe returned.
The wretched queen sat cowering on the plank,
They dragged her from the spot, they burst the trap
And leapt into the vault; a clash of swords
Was heard below, the stag had turned to bay,
The hounds fell fast before him for a while.
Think how she listened who had given her life
To save her king, fearing it given in vain!
She had drawn near, and hung above the pit
Hearing the clamour, till a silence fell,
And issuing forth up came the Grahame at last.
She looked into his face; no need had she
To ask the end, at last her strength was gone,
And she fell down with one long gasping cry;
When, as her mantle dropped, they saw the truth,
The truth that blanched his cheek who never flinched
Nor knew remorse or pity when his king
Clung to his knees, half dead, imploring life;
For even he could not but pity her

Who gave her youth and beauty to the grave,
Who held as nothing all her agony
Beside the end she hoped for, and in vain.

Now slumbers Catherine, her trouble past;
Death like a tender nurse hath stilled her cries
And hushed her to her rest; but though she sleep
Her memory wakes, and sometimes speaks a while
From the far ages, telling of the days
When women were as brave as beautiful,
And truth and loyalty had still the might
That fired a woman's heart to such a deed.

TO THE FAIR INCONSTANT.

DREAMEST thou that I mourn the days gone by
When I believed thee? happy ignorant days!
Nay, than mine eyes thy heart is scarce more dry!
Although within my breast a fire doth blaze,
A funeral flame, and I half wondering gaze
As hope and joy therein die silently.
Why should I blame thee, whom the world will praise?
Smiles (all thou hadst to give) I had of thee,
Having nor love nor truth, thou couldst not give them me!

THE SWALLOW'S FAREWELL.

THERE lies a gold crown
On the blue mountain's crest,
Which the sun hath cast down
Ere he sinks to his rest,
With wail broken-hearted
The sad wind is sighing
For summer departed
And flowers that lie dying.

Bathed in a golden gleam,
Lit by the sun's last beam,
To glitter the roof-tops seem
In the dying glow;
And blazes the tall church spire
Like a tongue of living fire,
Where the grey tower raises its head
And watches above the dead
Who sleep below.

Round and round the hamlet,
Round the old church tower,
There flits a single swallow
In the quiet twilight hour;
And where the baron's castle stands
Lording it over the outspread lands,
An image of feudal power,
You may see that single swallow go,
Fluttering high and fluttering low,
In the quiet twilight hour.
For the summer has gone to a distant land,
And the little blue swallows, a goodly band,
With morning light will leave the strand
And follow the sun and the flower.

But this one swallow only
Has stolen himself away,
And flies all sad and lonely
In the close of the autumn day.
He twitters and talks as he hovers and flies
Under the glorious evening skies,
As hither and thither he quickly hies.

* * * * *

THE SWALLOW.

On flickering wing I hurry and fly,
For soon will the sun sink down and die,
And I ere the night must revisit each spot
I loved in the days that are long gone by.
So down to the bright green meadows that lie
Stretched out by the river I quickly hie,
And I tarry not.
For I grow old and weary,
And when I shall leave this clime
To the winter cold and dreary,
And follow the summer time,
I shall never come back again, never again!
My bright blue feathers are flecked with grey
Like the sky at the close of an April day,
When the sun and the wind have beaten the rain
And the clouds are floating away.
I am growing very weary and old,
And when the sun comes back with the May,
To wake the flowers and kill the cold,
I shall lie dead, far far away!
So I must see them all once more,
The places I loved in the days of yore.

I swoop o'er the fields by the river
Where oft I hunted the fly,
When the sun made the hot air quiver
And the trout were fain to lie
Under the weeds in each deep pool,
Where the dark water was still and cool.
But I cared not
Though the sun were hot,
I came with the rush of an archer's shot!
And the gnats screamed shrill,
And the mayflies fled!
But the skies are chill
And they all are dead!
Oh! sweet green fields, as ye lie by the river
Where ever the tremulous aspens quiver
As spirits were passing near,
No more shall I see you! the summer will bring
The flies to sport o'er the streamlet's spring,
But I shall never with fluttering wing
Sweep o'er you in sunlight clear!

I am passing on to the hamlet now.
Laughter and song I hear below
And sounds of revelry catch,

Beneath the old grey cottages all,
The blue smoke wreaths that rise and fall
Over the mossgrown thatch.
Children beneath me are sporting there,
Their voices rise clear in the evening air,
Pipe and tabor merrily sound,
Merrily swings the dance around;
And I must leave them, I may not stay!
Will they miss the swallow so old and grey?
Farewell, farewell to ye, children dear!
I bless you from sorrow, from pain, from fear!
For none of your band
Would raise a hand
To aim at me as I floated near;
But, "*Martins and swallows*
Are God's best scholars,"
Ye sang with your voices sweet and clear!

The churchyard lies beneath,
The trees rock to and fro,
As though they mourned for those whom death
Hath laid in the cold earth low.
A mournful place, yet I love it too,
I know that so many I loved and knew

Are lying beneath the flowers and the dew.
Oh, church! I pray thee, watch them well,
My friends thou guardest there;
Let no bad spirit, no elfin fell
To trouble their slumbers dare!
Toll with thy holy, thy solemn bell
And keep whom I leave in thy care!

Now up to the castle old
I wing my flight;
The air grows damp and cold,
Fast falls the night;
Fain I my wings would fold
In slumber light.

Once more, once more, by my own dear nest!
Though smallest of any, I love it the best,
As it hangs in the nook of the castle wall
Just where the earliest sunbeams fall.
Sweetly we dwelt there, my mate and I,
But long, long ago I saw her die;
And all my children away have flown,
They loved me when little, but now they are grown,
And the old grey swallow is all alone!

Not quite alone; my nest
Hangs over a lattice high;
There lives a maiden the fairest and best
Of any beneath the sky.
Her hair like the raven's wing is black,
And her eyes are the hue of the kingfisher's back!
Oft would she sit with her dark blue eye
Swimming in tears, though none knew why;
But the poor little swallow knew the thought
That sorrowful clouds to her bright face brought,
For I could flit
Where I saw her sit
After the little white dove had lit—
She kissed the letter, she kissed the dove!
And at night I looked out from my nest above,
I saw her stand at her window and weep
When other mortals were wrapped in sleep,
And she and I were alone with the stars
As she spread her white arms through the window bars
And murmured, "Alas! my love, my love!"

I charge thee, old grey tower,
That thou guard the maiden well!

I bless her from evil power,
  I bless her from baneful spell!
The sun has gone down, dark grows the sky,
Mournfully comes the low wind's sigh—
I am going, going, the night draws nigh—
  Sweet maid, farewell, farewell!

* * * * *

The sun has risen dull and red
  Over the misty land,
  And away to a distant strand
The swallows all have fled, have fled!
All? not all; at the break of day,
Dead and cold in his nest there lay
One old swallow, old and grey!

THE SEASONS OF LIFE.

WHEN violets scent the woodland ways
And kingcups gild the meadow grass,
When thorns with blossom are all ablaze
And sweeten the winds that through them pass,
Merrily singing we pass the days,
Fill the woods with our joyous lays:
"Wreathe the flowers,
Build us bowers,
Long and sweet is this life of ours!"

When gorse has fired the barren hill,
And roses blush at the kiss o' the sun,
And minnows sport in the shallowing rill,
And vines are ripening, every one,
Not so sweet, so clear is our song,
Yet we chorus it loud and long:

"Garlands twine,
Drain the wine,
Joy is for ever and life divine!"

When rustling leaves that once were green
Sad burdens whisper 'neath our feet;
When never a bird or flower is seen,
And wild winds at the casement beat,
Our voices have gotten a mournful tone,
Our singing is turned to sob and moan:
"Joy is dead,
Hope has fled,
Graves have rest for the weary head!"

When naked trees, through mist that shrouds
Their shivering outstretched arms, do grope,
When light scarce pierces murky clouds,
And life seems vanished past all hope,
Peacefully waiting then we lie,
For endless pleasure and youth draw nigh:
Church bells toll,
"Rest to the soul
That reaches at length the wished-for goal!"

LILIAN IN THE FOREST.

PART I.

MORNING.

JUST where the daylight pierces through the trees,
Where to a twilight shade
The leafy darkness softens by degrees,
There lies a sunlit glade
In the forest green.

A tiny lawn shut in by circling boughs
Save only from above,
A fitting spot for lovers' secret vows;
The place seems made for love,
So fair the scene.

'Mid grass and flowers a sparkling pool there lies,
Wherein the cowslips peep

To view their beauty, o'er it summer flies
In mazy circles sweep
The livelong day.

A hawthorn thicket blooming sweet and white,
Beeches, a willow hoar,
Shut in the glade from vulgar curious sight,
And guard the grassy floor
With blossom gay.

Sweet little Lilian sits beside the pool,
The keeper's darling child,
Laving her small feet in the water cool,
Weaving the flow'rets wild
In a rustic crown.

Bluebell and daffodil she deftly weaves,
Tying the stems beneath
Upon a supple bough with sharp green leaves;
Now, finished, rests her wreath
On her ringlets brown.

What leaves are these to mingle with spring flowers
Upon a youthful brow?

Ah! sad presage of weary future hours!
She wears a willow bough
Even in childhood!

But what recks she of woe; the sun has shed
Light on her curling hair,
That mingles with the buds upon her head;
She knoweth nought of care
There in the wild wood.

She hath no playmates, yet she wants for none;
She knows the shy wild deer,
The brown hares stop and gaze, the birds each one
Hop round and have no fear,
As she sits alone,

Crooning a little song, with folded hands
As she leans against the tree,
The willow tree beside the pool that stands,
Full softly singeth she
In a half-hushed tone.

Innocent Lilian sits and nothing fears
With willow in her wreath;

She scarcely knows the name of grief or tears,
Of parting, sin or death,
What should she fear?

Watching the blue sky, where the branches break,
Wherein one downy cloud
Floats like a wild white swan upon a lake,
Majestic, silent, proud,
In the morning clear.

She thinks, "This world is very gay and bright,
The sunlight and the flowers;
If there were but no winter and no night
In this sweet world of ours,
'Twould be blither so!

Though there are sorrows very hard to bear—
Did not my kitten die?
And mother says there won't be cats up there
In heaven beyond the sky,
Kittens don't go!"

A flushing cheek, a lip half pouting out,
Eyes that are filling fast;

The shower is coming, when she turns about,
For something soft brushed past,
Her own brown fawn.

Its cold nose thrust into her tiny hand
Forgotten is her woe;
She kisses it, it seems to understand
And side by side they go
Across the lawn

Between the beeches, by the thorns they run
Now seen, now lost to sight;
The cloud has floated over, and the sun
Mounts to his noontide height.
Lilian is gone.

PART II.

AFTERNOON.

IN the stilly forest glade
The drowsy light is blinking,
And welcome seems the shade
From glaring sunlight shrinking;

The afternoontide glare
When the sun puts forth his might,
As revellers' torches flare
Before they sink in night.

Glassed in the peaceful water
Are bush and tree and sky,
And she, the keeper's daughter,
Who blushing stands thereby ;
Blushing by turns and paling
At the passionate words she hears,
Till, love o'er fear prevailing,
She sinks in his arms in tears.

Pressed to his heart he holds her,
And she sobs upon his breast
As he tells her his arms enfold her,
That there she shall find her rest ;
Whispering in her ear
Of future love and leisure,
She stays her sobs to hear
In a dreamy troubled pleasure.

The blush begins to fade,
A smile steals o'er her face ;

Ah! rosy brown-haired maid,
Trust not those arms' embrace!
"Oh, be of better cheer!
And banish vain alarms.
What should my Lilian fear
In her own true love's arms?"

With a shiver she starts away,
"Your love I may dearly rue,
You may weary of me some day,
I fear for your truth, Sir Hugh!
And I fear for my ownself too,
Women are weak as water,
And I know that you are Sir Hugh,
And I—am the keeper's daughter!"

He clasps her closer yet
With a sad reproachful gaze,
"Think you I can forget
The bliss of these summer days?
Am I a thing so slight
As to leave whom once I woo?
The years may take their flight,
But never will I from you!"

Softly he pleads and low,
Pleasantly chimes his voice,
It rings the knell of woe,
And bids her heart rejoice.
Oh! readily she believes,
Determined on believing;
His tale her ear deceives,
His own wild heart deceiving.

For he holds himself as true
As ever was ancient knight,
Never was lover knew
Less of the ruthless might
Of the quiet seeming stream
That swiftly bears them on
Who never of danger dream
Till hope of safety's gone.

There is none to bid them stay,
To speak of the sad to-morrow;
They live but for to-day,
When past seems all their sorrow.
For a veil is o'er their sight,
By love and fancy woven,

Shall make the dark seem bright
Till it be rudely cloven.

His strong arm holds her fast,
They saunter through the trees;
The sky grows overcast,
And moans the rising breeze.
The beeches bend and sway
As the lovers pass from sight,
Slowly draws on the day
To a wild and stormy night.

PART III.

NIGHT.

WILD is the night.
The owl flies whooping between the trees,
As they shudder and bend to the fitful breeze
In the dim half-light.

The rain is past;
The withered leaves that lie on the ground

Rustle and move with a whispering sound,
Stirred by the blast.

Half dark, half light,
For the angry clouds the moon that cover
Are torn by the storm and are hurrying over;
They hide her from sight.

Now floats the rack,
And seared and wan is her face as she peeps
Where paler seems her image that sleeps
In the waters black.

Where the willow stands,
With mossy trunk and boughs all stark,—
As praying in agony, there in the dark,
With outstretched hands,—

There crouches low
Upon the bank a woman alone,
And now with a song, and now with a moan,
Rocks to and fro.

Alone i' the night:
Damp and torn is the long brown hair,

Withered the cheek was once so fair,
But her eyes are bright,

Bright and dry.
She sobs and moans, but never a tear
May ease her heart; now wild and clear
Her song swells high.

"The night is as wild as a drunkard's dream,
Loud roars the torrent, the wind raves high;
The torrent, in summer a tinkling stream,
The wind, in summer a half-hushed sigh,
Now each to outroar the other they try!

"False lover, false lover!
Thine eyes were bright!
But the sods they now cover
Thy beauty from sight!
How couldst thou deceive me?
Why did I believe thee?
Loud roars the wind in the winter's night.

"Noble knight and haughty maiden!
Little did ye think the air

Breathed across the pool was laden
With the curses of despair!
Crouching lowly in the bracken,
There I heard him pour his vows
In her ear, where I, forsaken,
Once had listened 'neath the boughs!
And they stood beneath the beech
Where he wooed me for his bride,
Where he witched me with his speech,
Where I slew my maiden pride!"

See where the cloud floats over the moon,
The song sinks down to a mournful croon.

"What hast thou done with thy flowers, little pond?
What hast thou done with thy flowers?
Thou art like me, for I was too fond,
And wasted my blossom in summer hours!

"Now my soul is dark and wild,
Dark as thy still water!
Dost thou remember me? I was a child,
I was the keeper's daughter.

I played by thy brink, where now I must sink!
I was fair and—nay! but I must not think!"

The moon steals forth from the muffling cloud,
The maniac's chant is wild and loud.

"My knife was sharp, my arm was strong,
My love had sworn that he would be true!
My arm was nerved by my cruel wrong!
Why didst thou meet me alone, Sir Hugh?

"Who shed bitterer tears than I?
Wept for my lover I thought so true;
Little they thought how I saw him die!
Why didst thou meet me alone, Sir Hugh?

"Lady Grace with her raven hair
Wept awhile; but her tears she dried
When the baron made her his lady fair.
I have wept ever since he died!

"I have wept ever, and I shall weep;
Ah! I never shall see him, never!

Though mine eyes be closed in sleep,
Still I must weep, and weep for ever!

"Yesterday when she passed me by;
Oh! but I cursed her, and she turned white!
'Only mad Lilian!' the neighbours cry;
She pitying stared, and passed me by.
Yet mad Lilian's curse shall light!

"Hide thy face, O wandering moon!
Thou mindest me of the eyes of my lover!
I shall go from the forest soon,
But first thy sorrowful face, O moon!
The veil of clouds must cover.

"Aha! pale moon, thou ridest, ridest
Over the blue and under the rack,
Thou wilt flout me no more as bright thou glidest
For I shall be gone when thou comest back!
How thou wilt peer through the clouds in fear
Quick! let me go, she will soon be here!"

A wild loud laugh through the darkness rings;
A plunge—she is silent, no more she sings.

The moon peers out again; her light she flings
On pool and sward and trees,
She sees where on the water spread the rings,
No living soul she sees.
Lilian is gone.

POEMS PUBLISHED (*IN PART*) BEFORE 1869.

THE FIVE STARS.

THE stars came sliding from the south,
By one, by two, by three;
Of love on earth was full great drouth,
And careless hand to thankless mouth
Set all the lewd menyie.

The stars came sliding up the sky,
By three, by four, by five;
Each seeking if it might descry
The palace where this King should lie:
The angels carolled blive.

These stars since first the stars were born
They clustered all together,
Beneath the new moon's lower horn,
Like bees upon a summer thorn,
When cloudless was the weather.

The first star was a star of red,
It heard an angel sing,
"This night a maid in oxen's bed,
A queen uncrowned, a wife unwed,
Hath borne a mighty King."

The second star was bright and blue,
It heard a song above,
"On Jesse's root drops down the dew,
The budding rod hath bloomed anew,
All peace to men of love!"

The third was yellow for to see,
It heard the voices tell,
"Now standeth in the gate the key,
The gates of glory open be:
All hail, Emmanuel!"

The fourth it listened in that steven,
This star it glittered green:
"The Wisdom hath come down from heaven,
Now worketh well the saving leaven."
Thus sang the choir unseen.

The fifth star was a little star,
A voice bespoke it low,
"Go forth into that land afar
Where in the cave the sleepers are,
To guide the sleepers, go!"

The stars they journeyed in a ring,
Into the north them gat;
Above a cave they stayed to swing,
Where rested first the white dove's wing
On holy Ararat.

There were three sleeping in the cave,
The night seemed long to them,
All listening from their living grave,
The three who 'scaped the whelming wave,
Good Japhet, Ham, and Shem.

Then up they rose, and on they yode,
The stars went on before,
A-glittering down the western road;
The stars in Bethlehem abode
Above the stable door.

The stars they shaped them to a tree,
Slid back to southern lands:
They bend above the Peaceful sea,
For head and burdened body three,
And two for blessing hands.

AVE MARIA.

NOW kneeling at the throne of God
With fainting hearts and sickened,
When as we pray Him spare the rod,
When ills and pangs are thickened,
We cry to thee, His mother dear,
Cry thou to Him that He may hear
And we His sons be quickened.

Daughter and Mother of our God!
Offspring of barren Anna!
Ark that didst hold the flowering Rod,
The Law, the feeding Manna,
Let thy entreaty for our sin,
That He, thy Son, will spare His kin,
Pierce through the saints' Hosanna!

It is not that we dread thy Son,
How can we fear our Brother?

But we have scorned Him every one,
And left Him for another;
Now we return, our cries are faint,
Our tongues are bound by sin's constraint,
Aid thou our crying, Mother!

He will not list less graciously
That thou assist our calling,
His eyes behold each bended knee,
His heart our prayers forestalling;
But limbs are stiff, and lips are dry,
With wandering and revelry,
All faint our hearts and falling.

We pray Thee, when the night is dark
And faith brings no relieving,
Lest the wild waters quench the spark
Of heaven's first conceiving,
Pray, that we sink not in the deep,
Nor fall on hopeless, troubled sleep,
Trembling or unbelieving.

When this sad night with fevered glare
Dissembles daylight's shining,

When's hell's allurements are most rare,
When round our hearts is twining
The fatal green that kills our life,
Pray, lest we fall who make no strife;
Let fire be but refining!

And when in grief tempestuous
Our spirits faint, be near us!
When fogs of care surround, and thus
We see no light to cheer us,
Pray, for they are too weak to pray
Who know no hope, and feel no stay;
Ave Maria! hear us

ORPHEUS.

THROUGH hollow ways long wandering
Where blackness wooed the bat's thin wing,
By sullen streams too deep to sing,
Through silence made the heart to wring,
Too awed to stay, too sad to flee,
He stumbled on—a plash, a gleam,
Met ear and eye, as in a dream,
And he passed outward to the sea.

Ever the wandering waves of water,
Sorrowful waves of the waiting sea,
Sighed to the rocks, "Earth's fairest daughter
Is lost to earth:—Eurydice!"

Oh! fair and cool the green sea-swell,
The tangle tresses that rose and fell,
To hot eyes dazed with glare of hell,
Made blind with peering to dispel

The gloom of that dreat upward way;
And here at hand as fair and cool
Was this still fan-encircled pool
That wooed his weary feet to stay.

"Ah! we were glad," said the waves of water,
"Glowed in the morning and danced for glee,
Thinking—She comes whence her lover sought her
To sport in the ripples:—Eurydice!"

He leaned his back against a stone:
Most sweet on strand to be alone!
To hearing dulled by shriek and groan,
By silence of that cavern lone,
Most pleasant was the curlew's cry,
The far-off sounds from inland field,
The gull's sharp scream that dipped and wheeled
Above the shoal, the ripple nigh.

But, "All in vain," said the waiting water,
"We listened at noon, if haply we
Might hear her singing the songs he taught her,
As she came from the dead:—Eurydice!"

Around his feet who bore the lyre
The water rose, and quenched their fire,

And washed away the burning mire;
He half forgot his burden dire,
He half forgot his vanished love,
And all his weakness, and his curse,
With that old wise caressing nurse
That kissed, nor said, "Why didst thou rove?"

"The evening came," said all the water,
"And we are lorn, and lost is she,
For he hath come again who sought her,
But nevermore—Eurydice!"

And when his feet were cool and strong
He took the pathway, winding long
Up through the cliffs, and bursts of song
Came to his lips to ease his wrong:
He sang, and for a little space
Knew nothing of the inner smart,
As all his singing warmed his heart
And brought the blushes to his face.

But, "Home again," said the waiting water,
"Must thou come to the burying sea,
While, hapless, she woos hell's grim porter,
Chanting her name—Eurydice!"

NARCISSUS.

ALL night the woods had echoed his complaint,
His tears all night had fed the moon-lit spring;
At setting of the moon his voice grew faint,
And, when the dewy-breasted rose to sing,
Quiet he lay upon the long-pressed bed
Whose green was fringing fast with springing snow:
Beneath him, in the waters, lay outspread
The white limbs of his love, and in the flow
His loose arm dropping over the low bank
Dipped, and his love's arm rising from below,
As if in haste his fealty to thank,
Reached up and met the weary hand that sank:
So they were joined at last, and she that clove
The thread, undid the coil the horny-fingered wove.

A LOST RACE.

"A FOOTPACE on, and a footpace done,
And a leap on the smooth white sand,
The chase is done, and my safety won,
His robe floats out to my hand;
A chain for the rover, and a bed for the lover,
And a light for the funeral brand!

"My feet are as fleet as the stag's light feet,
And his go soft to his dole,
And now he lags, and now he flags,
And yonder the brazen goal;
A fire and a rest for the wilful guest,
And myrrh, and a poured-out bowl!

"Stretch forth, O hand! to the fluttering band,
And stay my fleeting wooer,"
But lo! a fruit, in the full pursuit
Hath stayed the hot pursuer,

That rolls from his robe, a glittering globe,
To the sea, as sea were truer.

Oh, apple, apple! with side all dapple,
She stays, she turns, the fleeter;
She grasps her fate, and her fated mate
Turns from the goal to greet her:
And, hey! for the bride, the bonnie, bonnie bride!
For clip than coursing meeter!

AT THE BACK OF AN OPERA BOX.

WHO? Did I hear your name aright?
How had you heart to tell it?—
But this is a secret-speaking light.—
How many years is it since we met,
Since you taught me love's alphabet?
A pleasant lesson I learnt to write!
Let us sit here and spell it.

You taught me first on a winter's night,
A night such as men remember;
I lay at your feet in the warm firelight,
And all the rest of the room was dim,—
Your deep, low voice, like a far-off hymn,
Witched me to lie and feed on your sight
In your glory of ripe September.

What was it in you that drove me mad?
Lithe limbs and golden locks?
Eyes that for naught were soft or glad?
Or your wise words?—You are silent now;
You hide your breast, and your head you bow,
As you sit beside me, old and sad,
Here at the back of the box.

You had a box on the grand tier then,
We have come down a little!
You leaned from the front to the eyes of men,
As the lamp-light flashed from your white shoulders,
But now—shrink back from all beholders,
Lurk at the back of this upstairs den—
So came Creseide to the 'spital.

Hush! there are too many ears about,
The time is gone for heroics,
You are too thin, and I am too stout;
But still, I suppose we have hearts the same,
The ashes shake where leapt the flame;—
It's foolish to stir the heap, no doubt!
But we never set up for stoics.

"Did I not know?"—yes! I had ears,
They said you were this and that,
I knew that the world looked on with sneers;
But you were my beautiful Helen then,
If you had brought grief to other men
What matter to me!—oh, those young years,
Ere the mouse has proved the cat!

Do you remember one summer night?
Perhaps you thought me a fool!—
You lay by my side as our troth were plight,
With all your wonderful bosom bare,
And your head in a glory of floating hair,—
And I spoke calmly, and blessed the sight.
Did you think I was dull and cool?

No, I think that you dimly saw
How I loved too much for lust;
The poor boy's love, so pure and raw,
Was freshening to your withered heart,
You pitied your prey, and lost your art,
You treasured the flame that had brought a thaw
To your hard heart's icy crust.

Ah, well !—good-night—go home and sleep :
I will go home and pray.
Your eyes are bright still, bright and deep
Sunken into your hollow cheeks,—
And you are dumb, but your wan face speaks,
Saying those eyes have learnt to weep
That laughed my laugh away.

THE MUSICIAN.

DEATH came into a palace,
Where a ruler sat in state,
He slipped the bolt of the postern gate,
And kissed the lip of the chalice;
He sat on the steps of the throne unseen,
And tinkled a ghostly mandoline,
Whose jar struck cramp to the tyrant's heart
And clashed in his ear like a nearing fight;
The player laid his quill apart,
Grasped the stiffening hand and white,
Whirled his partner into the night.

Death lay out on a reef,
Bleaching in sun and wind,
Striking a harp of marvellous kind,
Twisted of fibre, root, and leaf;
The sailors floated anigh to listen,
The diver let his wet shoulders glisten

Above the waters—they heard, and dreamed,
And harped to quiet was all the deep;
Till the surf grew red, and the drowning screamed—
Not for harping the shark would sleep,
Nor the sharp rocks spare the keels to reap.

Death stole into a bower
Where waited a maid alone,
Not a phantom of blackened bone,
A shape to make her doubt or cower;
Most like a suitor grave and bland
He took her palm with a dainty hand,
Playing the while on a silver viol
A solemn spring that assuaged her care,
As she thought of the prize, and forgot the trial,
Led her a measure stately and fair,
Up to the foot of the golden stair.

In cradle wept a child;
Death at the noise of its crying
Came and lifted it whence it was lying,
With sleepy song its heart beguiled;
Dandling, rocking it to and fro,
Singing a drowsy old hey-balow:

The babe looked up with a still content
Into the good face, as it heard,
Closed its eyes, and softer went
The nursing song that sleep conferred—
Sleep so sound that it never stirred.

Death in a city street
Beat up a loud alarm:
They who heard of the hurrying swarm
Held it the stroke of horses' feet,
The rattle of coaches rolling by,
Or the herald of coming pageantry:
Yet there was gathered a various throng
Out of the crowd by the tabor's thrum,
With wailing, and laughter, with silence, and song,
Knowing, unknowing, and shrieking, and dumb,
A motley army to follow the drum.

Then where there sate in quiet
Some who were sick with noise,
Listening for the summoning voice,
Thinking Death spoke in the riot,
He came—and a whisper of Lydian flutes,
O'er the gabble of men and the chatter of brutes,

Held the ears of the weary-hearted,
And lightened to each his labour's tale;
And each went on, and a veil was parted,
And they met the music behind the veil,
And looked—and the player was mild and pale.

THE BLESSING OF THE HAZEL TREE.

ALONE in greenwood musing
The Virgin Mother strayed;
That mother blest, on her pure breast
Her Holy Son was stayed.

When as there came a tempest,
No shelter might she take
In hut or house, but under boughs,
All in a hazel brake.

So when the sky was smiling,
Before she went her way,
Thus blessèd she the nutting tree
With tassels red and grey.

"Blest be thy boughs, O Hazel!
For the kindness thou hast done:

Sweet be thy seed, that in my need
Hast helped me shield my Son!

"When thunder roareth loudest,
And loud the tempest blows,
The bolts of light shall spare to smite
Where any hazel grows.

"For that the Living Water
Was bowered by thy shade,
When men with pain seek springs in vain
Thy wood shall lend them aid.

"For that the Serpent Queller
Hath lain beneath thy leaves,
Still shall thy charm abate the harm
Of snake that peasant grieves.

"The braggart king of serpents
No more shall vex the world,
But under ground safe held and bound
Among thy roots be curled.

"If by his stinging servants
In terror goeth any,

Shall hazel white heal adder's bite,
Thus be thy virtues many."

And thus of all the woodland
The hazel hath greatest grace,
In shaugh or by spring, where its branches spring,
The shade is a blesséd place.

A CAGED LARK.

ABREAST with dim and ruffled feather,
An awful dancing, devoid of mirth,
A cry going up through the summer weather,
Accusing men who have spoiled the earth.

His weary feet with memories mocking,
A smoke-dried morsel of blackened sod;
As he to the free ones heavenward flocking
Is it to the earth that was blessed of God.

The crowd that pass his prison under
Declare him happy because he sings!
They are not cruel, they only blunder,
Drink of the river, nor think of its springs.

They would loose him, shuddering, rather,
Could they but rightly read his song,
How to the common and pitiful Father
It cries for justice for this his wrong.

Alas! but accuse not me, my brother!
For thou and I have a common grief;
Thou art a prisoner, I am another,
With only our song for our hearts' relief.

Thou, in the cage with the narrow wires,
Whence thy shrill agony skyward peals;
I, on the wheel that never tires—
Alas! the bars, and the dull-toothed wheels!

Alas! to be caged in the summer weather!
Bound when the fields in sunlight lie!
And oh! to be out on the downs together,
I in the bracken, and thou in the sky.

A NORTHERN SAILOR'S HYMN TO THE HESPERIDES.

UNDER his hills who holds the strong world
In sunlight bathing, (steady,
Laid in long grass that shows for mowing ready,
Your white waists swathing,
Under your lawn's one crowning tree at ease;
Your long locks twined among the grasses be,
Where ye lie ever calm, O sacred three!
Holding your watchful state, gold-limbed Hesperides!

Each flower of your tree receives
Your meadow breath,
The blossom, barren else, conceives
In throes of death;
Slain by the passion of the bringing forth
They fall around you as ye lie below,
Veiling with Thulé-seeking shade the glow,
To hold you from our eyes—to hold unknown the north.

Through that rose-rain and snow, on spice-wind floated,
Stealeth a singing,
Whence ye lie, poppy-hearted, amber-throated,
The tree round ringing,
Where all the hidden buds below, to kiss
Your sun-bright limbs, creep upward through the grass;
Shadows of birdless boughs above you pass,
Your voice alone may time the pulsing of your bliss.

The fadeless triumph of those leaves
No canker daunts,
Among the twigs no spider weaves,
No vermin haunts:
Only between the boughs a gleaming coiling,
Green as the boughs, and golden as their bearing,
And crest like windy west in sunset flaring,
Show where the sun-drake wakes to shield your care from spoiling.

Gold fruit, more golden than the after-gleaning
Of northern barley,

He holds secure from rashness overweening,
  Or guileful parley:
Full-ripe for plucking as your fruit, he holdeth
  You among all the nymphs unclipped alone,
  While every other sports with loosened zone,
Each rests, nor any arm her quiet heart enfoldeth.

Shame on his guard, with sleepless lid
  That holds unseen
The splendour of each Hesperid,
  The bed of green
Where hero, nymph-beloved, might lap for ever,
  Fed with his spoils who, loveless, wards love's blisses,
  Drunk with the savour of new tasted kisses,
Forgetting aught but love—grief, labour, or endeavour.

Honey-mouthed, grass-becouchen, flower-hidden,
  Break through your vailing!
Now the south wind lifts up the sail, unbidden,
  From listless trailing;
The low light striking off your distant hill
  Flashes upon our wake, who journey forth
  To wander cheerless in the watery north,
Starlit alone, blown on by breezes damp and chill.

RICHARD IN PRISON.

TWELVE paces—and a wall, a blank white wall;
Twelve paces back and here again a wall,
With one small window—and small help in that!
Why, here they cross the vent with iron bars,
And bars take tithing of the air and light
That come through any honest window-place.
At night their bulk divides the pleasant breeze,
And brings a broken air to greet my cheek;
And in the day they make, if sunshine comes,
A chequered pattern, where broad light should be.
On cloudy days they only vex my soul
That shakes them wildly, though my hands disdain:
Worst in the night, for then I hide mine eyes,
The moonlight looks so ghastly, prisoned out.

(*A voice without sings:*)

The ladies loved the lion,
For he was a gallant beast,

He drank to the dearest,
And kissed the nearest,
And praised the queen of the feast:
But the lion hath passed from mortal ken,
The snarling jackal holds his den.

The people loved the lion,
For the lion was true and strong,
The blow of his paws
Set right the laws
That did the people wrong:
But folk with tears may wash their chains,
Instead of the lion the jackal reigns.

We had a prisoner in Palestine;
We had not many—prisons are for men,
Corpses ask graves—but we had one, I know.
They brought him to my tent, a Bedouin,
And he bent knee, and wept, and wrung his hands,
When I, in pity of his noble form,
Held him to ransom, praying me for death,
Death the most horrible—impalement—fire—
Rather than he should lose the voice of man,
And clamour of nature's sounds, and sun of heaven.

He said, for so they told me, that to live
Shut in by walls was thrice three times a death,
And prayed me I would give him honest death!
A parting with the sun upon his face,
The free unfettered breeze to fan his eyes
When they grew hot with pain, an honest death!
He prayed me as a man, and knowing men;
Whereat I laughed and lightly turned away.—
I have no laughter now for such as he.

(*The voice without.*)

O Richard! O my king,
Though hell itself beset thee,
Though careless mother, and cruel brother,
And faithless friend forget thee,
If blood of our veins might loose thy chains
There were corpses, and none should let thee!

There is so strange a singing in mine ears
As though the voices of the birds had words.
There's my old blackbird now can talk to me,
Out of his pear tree, in his own wise way,—
Telling me how the cherries are aglow,
And make him scorn his lately cherished feast

Of grub and bud;—but he talks only rhyme,
And I hear reason.—Is the gold all spent
In England, or are all the true hearts gone,
Buried in Ascalon, the men's true hearts?
Then where are all their ladies? Wed with clowns?
Sweet Leopold, if I win home again,
Dread not lest I requite thy brotherhood!
Good brother, if I wear my crown again
Hold thou thy head! And thou, my lady mother,
False to my sire and me, look to thyself!

(*The voice without.*)

The ladies sleep for sorrow,
The villeins wake and weep:
What hope in their to-morrow
For wolf-betended sheep?
Only a sharpening of their pains,
Only a tightening of their chains,
A carrying-off of the whitest lambs,
A rending and tearing of tenderest dams,
And no bold lion to leap.

Do not the wives say in our England now,
"Where is that Richard whom we knew and loved?

Where is the hand that laid the sceptre down
To grasp our fingers? Do they sleep, those eyes
That laughed to see our beauty, while our lords
Grew prouder of our beauty for their praise?
The voice that bid us banquet, is it mute?
Quenched in the uttering of a rallying cry?"
Have they no thought? I loved all womankind
As knight may love, who yet hath one pure dame;
They should remember me. The men are gone:
Some, the thrice blesséd, sleep in Palestine,
Hard by their Master's tomb; and some are drowned,
Whose barks were not so hardy as their hearts;
And some are cast away on cruel shores,
To lead a dismal life of want and war
Among the tribes who look on them as gods,
These men who, all day toiling after food,
Yet rise from short-snatched sleep to slay, and sleep.
The men are done, the men went all with me:
Those two-legged things that, wielding no strong sword,
Can wield no distaff, that would kneel and sue
To their own ass and pray him not to kick,
What reck they of the lion—like to like!
But there were women in our England once,

And once there were strong singers, and true folk
Whom they could rouse, and yet how lie I walled!

(*The voice without.*)

Ehé! la Marguerite:
She was so white and sweet,
That all the meadow-grass grew tender
And thought some fair thing to engender
On la belle Marguerite.

Ehé la Marguerite:
They crept around her feet,
They grew up tall and waved above,
They said, "Our craft hath won our love,
La belle blanche Marguerite!"

Ehé! la Marguerite:
They said, "The hours are fleet:
Let fall upon her head our down,
And win gold heart and silver crown,
The dower of Marguerite."

Ehé! la Marguerite:
They said, "'Tis right and meet
That meadow-grass with feather crown

Should win the darling of the down,
La belle blanche Marguerite!"

Ehé! la Marguerite:
She had a love discreet,
The red rose, and he climbed and shed
His leaves upon her shrinking head,
And won la Marguerite.

Fade out, ye bars, and let the sunlight in!
Drop down, O walls! that for a little while
Have held me, as the tomb held Whom I love!
O Christ! Who sufferedst, look down on me!
I have so suffered, and I bore it all!
All the great agony of shortened step,
And weakened arm, and dulling of my mind,
Yet made no sign; but now the nearing end
Hath well-nigh slain me, and I shake, and pant,
And weep as women weep.—One man is left,
One singer!—Ah! my bird, pipe golden-voiced,
With now no sound of mocking in thy song
But less of music; I am free as thou,
And can outsing thee, as my singer can
Who lures me with the tune I taught his lute!

THE DEATH OF CYNEWULF.

WHERE Wandle threads the willow-grove,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
There lived a royal light-o'-love,
She sent King Cynewulf her glove,
And bade the hawk come mate the dove.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Their love was told the carrion kite,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
Was told to Cynaerd, broken knight,
He lurked anigh his lord to smite,
He thought it long till fell the night.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

King Cynewulf in Merton lay,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
All for the love of his lady gay
He neither recked of night nor day;

Cynaerd rose to take the prey.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

The king arose, he rose in haste,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
His breast was bare, his shoe unlaced,
He plucked his sword beside his waist,
He gave it traitors' blood to taste:
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Merrily swung the good brown blade,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
But one to ten is a sorry trade,
In vain his lady wept and prayed,
"Ever, alas! will no man aid?"
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Ten to one are odds I doubt,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
They rallied round, the traitor rout,
He might not long uphold the bout,
A dagger let his life blood out.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

His lady moaned, his lady wept,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver ;*)
The clash and cries at length they crept
Into their drowsy ears who slept,
And wild they stared, and up they leapt ;
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

They came thronging down the stair,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver ;*)
But half awake, and wholly bare ;
Their swords were numb, and cut the air,
Most doleful was the slaughter there ;
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

The news hath sped with morning light,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver ;*)
All honest men fare forth to fight,
Led out King Cynewulf to right
By Osric duke, and Wigfert knight.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

" Now come ye forth, all kin of ours !
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver ;*)
Avoid the den where Cynaerd cowers ;

Above his head the tempest lowers,
Why should ye fall when fall these towers?"
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

"But nay, he hath our faith and troth!
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
The king his men to bow were loth,
Shall their awaking shame our sloth?
Come loss or gain, we bide them both!"
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Then they went to it, shout and clang,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
The doors were shivered with the bang
Of trunks of trees, the arrows sang,
Beneath the blades the armour rang.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Now back and forward swayed the fight,
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver;*)
Until as day drew on to night
False Cynaerd fell, the dust to bite;
So wrong was quelled, avenged the right.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

Most pitiful it was to see
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver*)
How kin with kin strove mortally,
And none would hold, and none would flee,
Such might have truth and treachery.
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

The son with whom the church had blessed
(*Merton willows, they bend and shiver*)
Duke Osric's age, among the rest
Fell down a traitor, unconfessed :
God grant our England peace and rest !
(*The trout swims low in the Wandle river.*)

UTHER.

UTHER.

Book I.

NOW Easter came, and brought the sun in hand,
The Rising-day when gladness grows to flood,
And bride-wise clothed the hedges of the land
That all too long in widow garb had stood,
With wind-blown wealth bedecked the sallow sand,
And palled with flower of Pasch the gory mud;
The spring brought rest to earth from winter's fight,
As morn brings sleep to eyes that wake all night.

The land lay down to rest, that long had toiled,
The haunting phantoms faded whom she fought;
Her children, who long months had wept and moiled,
Took heart to taste the must their labour wrought;
The Ambron might was quelled, the treason foiled,
And heathen leaders, into bondage brought,
Both Osca and Eosa, royal thralls,
Must learn how sorely serfdom's collar galls.

For Hengist headless lay by Eldol's sword,
And Horsa rotting on a wold of Kent;
Rowena passed, the flames had claimed her lord;
Unwilling, to far shelter Childric went;
Was none might hate or envy aid afford,
So all the land had rest and full content.
To London, chiefest city towards the east,
King Uther boun him for to keep the feast.

Leave we to tell of thousand beeves, that roared
Beneath the axe, still sheep, and angry swine;
How bottles saw the light that grandsires stored,
How pumps ran milk and conduits spouted wine,
How ancient coffers yawned to yield their hoard,
And rusty hearths grew black with smoke of pine,
How night and day the chimes unwearied rang,
Flags fluttered, cauldrons steamed, and churchmen sang.

Oh me! it was a goodly sorry show,
The ruined city in her brave array;
From nodding roofs hung banners all a-row,
On battered walls hung cloth and arras gay,
And shattered porch and arch to thickets grow,
While over those strange stains they rushes lay;

The steeples tremble, as the peal outswells,
With new surprise at sound of their own bells.

The paschal tapers burned in holy Paul's,
The sun of March still stood anear his height,
When brazen horns, with peace attunéd calls,
To banquet summoned dame, and prince, and knight;
The feast was spread within those hoary walls
Whose lonely donjon men still call 'The White.'
Here revelled they, while serf and villein slept,
Toasting the king and Him Whose day they kept.

It was not then as now a dreary keep,
Where ghosts unhouseled wandering wring and wail,
Where echoes of lost weepings never sleep,
And faces, long grown dust, make stout hearts quail,
As through the silent corridors there creep
Feet that on floor beat out no warning tale
To mark how close pursued is he who flies:
As yet 'twas pure, that tower of agonies.

There were great towers for fight, wide halls for pleasure,
Guard rooms for fighting men, and bowers for dames;

Alleys, and groves, and lawns entreating leisure,
And terraces with steps washed white by Thames:
Close cells for prayer, strong vaults for holding treasure,
Porches, and passages, and courts for games,
With butteries, kitchens, cellars, past the tale;
These a broad bastion held into its pale.

There was a hall, whose walls of marble stone
And floor were like the banners, white and red,
Whose roof seemed a dead forest, that had grown
Into strange root and branch of limb and head,
Beneath whose dusky covert, laughter-blown,
Wavered their banners who the host had led,
Who now upon the scarlet couches lay
Beside their wine, and held their holiday.

The wall waved with wrought story of the line:
Here Carthage' queen lay on her funeral pyre,
Here the dim waters gulfing sad Sabrine,
There Corineus tamed the giant's ire,
Here Ursula put forth to seek her shrine,
There awful glared the seer without a sire;
Huge dragon heads with teeth of beaten gold
Held up the heavy silken bordered fold.

On dais high victorious Uther sate,
Throned on a chair whose magic shapen mould
In semblance was that harbinger of fate,
The dragon; high in emerald coiling rolled
His tail in rear, on either side elate
Upreared the burnished wings of steel and gold,
For footstool lay the low be-crouchéd head,
Above there waved St. George's cross of red.

There were twice twenty tables long and wide,
Where all were seated in degree of rank,
Each knight beside his lady love or bride;
While at their feet, in rushes green that sank,
Lay the great hounds, with wistful eyes and wide
That watched the master, and thin quivering flank;
And lower down were gathered page and squire,
Sitting above the salt, but owning higher.

Beneath the salt retainers thronged the board,
Or lay at length carousing on the flags;
In every corridor much ale was poured,
In every porch the beggars shook their rags,
On alms unasked they ranted and they roared,
And stuffed with princes' food their greasy bags,

Despising meal and milk, drank humming ale,
And gorged on bustard, ptarmigan, and quail.

Igerna! dark Igerna! Gorlois' dame,
Thou honey-blossom of the western hills!
What didst thou to light up the sudden flame
Between the dragon wings that growing thrills
Great Uther's limbs, what art hadst thou to tame
His wild and restless heart, with thee that fills?
By thy virginity the lion's rage
Is quelled, he seeks thy feet a trusty page.

There be three kinds of virgins in this earth;
First, who are wedded to divinity
For love of Him who came of maiden birth;
Next, who lament their sad virginity
For lack of kindred heart, or coffer's dearth;
Last, who to first bear close affinity,
True maids who wait for wedlock, and chaste wives
Who to their lawful lords have bowed their lives.

Igerna, ringéd maiden, snooded dame;
When he who held her troth, full sore perplexed,

Claimed her right hand, the land was all aflame
With fires that told how Saxons Britain vexed;
Before the altar lay she without shame
One moment in his arms, alone the next:
So it fell out that she, full six weeks wedded,
Till now had held her lonely bower unbedded.

The king leans back between the dragon wings,
His brown cheek blushing with unwonted heats;
In empty ear the revel's tumult sings,
He only hears his heart that leaping beats,
Desiring hitherto unfancied things;
His creeping limbs are bathed in chilly sweats,
His loose hand hardly stays the goblet's fall;
By turns his eyes grow dim, and burns each ball.

O Lust! hot-handed fiend, that ruling men
Dost make of wisest fools, of truest liars,
Forth issuing from the ever-yearning den,
Waving thy torch inflamed at quenchless fires,
Luring with promised shelter from the fen
Lost wanderers to stifle in its mires,
So strong for others, for thyself so weak,
How on mankind thy vengeance dost thou wreak!

For Lust was soft Desire in Paradise,
A comely sprite, attending all that breathed,
In bridal garb, with frank beseeching eyes,
Whose brows with rose and myrtle were enwreathed;
But when that man had grown so deathly wise,
When the dread cherub's falchion was unsheathed,
Desire, grown mad, a haggard devil grew,
Fairest and foulest of the haunting crew.

He goes about to work mankind despite,
His wan cheeks scorched with tears that never tire,
With bright torn hair, and weary eyes, whose light
Have fever's beat, with atrophy's desire,
White clutching hands that seek though grasping tight,
In bloody robe that tells of wooing briar;
Only his voice is sweet, wherewith he sings
To whom he lulls asleep with vampire-wings.

They brought a horn, for so the king ordained,
Mingled of ale and honey, wine and spice,
Which horn by every chieftain must be drained,
And kissed by every lady blessing-wise,
That so in loving bonds grew all constrained,
And as each quaffed his neighbours must arise

To guard the draught from ill on either hand,
As was the dateless custom of this land.

And ladies lipped the cup, and amorously
The lutes rang kissingly, that men grew fain ;
Anon the trumpets flourished clamorously
As some strong knight th' inverted horn would drain :
Those kissed full coyly, these drank valorously,
We ne'er may see such dame or knight again !
Such was the order of the cup of grace,
The ancient ordering of other days.

Now blithe upsprings the jolly minstrelsy
As to the king the first they bear the horn,
The end of grief, the golden time to be,
Loud harping chants Urien, bard unshorn ;
Loud answer making, harpers hundreds three
With voice and string the burden have upborne,
Till men hold breath beyond the outer wall
To hear the harpers harping in the hall.

King Uther took the beaker, and stood up,
Grinding his right heel on the dragon's crown,

He cooled his palms upon the beaded cup,
And drank as he his burning heart would drown;
Then wilder, brighter, eye and cheek lit up,
With throat new bared, and panting limbs half shown,
He stood before the throng, the pages shrank,
Half-deeming the old god of Vineyards drank.

The knights leant forward, breathing under-hand,
The ladies watched the king to track his eyes,
The squires were all agog, alert the band,
Even the jesters stayed their mummeries
To wonder to what maid of all the land
Should come great Uther's kiss for fruitful prize;
The draught was done, in gasps the bidding came,
"Bear ye my greeting to Duke Gorlois' dame!"

Then all cried out, "The horn to Gorlois' bride!
Good be the omen, honour and increase!"
And lutes made answer as the drink she tried,
Glad that such sweet lips blessed the cup of peace;
But Gorlois, where he lounged his love beside,
Gnawed at his beard, and frowned as ill at ease;
Watching the king, he muttered angrily,
"Aye, aye! the horn to her, and what to me?"

Igerna thought no ill, but sate again
To nurse the omen's promise in her breast,
The hope that lent her cheek a summer stain,
And tossed her heart against her watchet vest;
'Twas said, the maid who drank first of the train
With a brave son should ere a year be blest;
She blushed, they cheered, but Gorlois chafed and fumed,
He guessed what flame his leader's youth consumed.

And he who in the battle spread his shield
To ward the darts, lest one should harm his king,
Who held it joy with him to lie a-field,
Fed with raw carrion and eft-haunted spring,
Whose truth nor threat nor promise made to yield,
Now eyed his rival like an evil thing:
In want, by fellowship, their love had waxed,
In ease, by rivalry, its bonds were laxed.

He got but little comfort from his watching,
He only saw the king's intent more plainly,
Who sate a-dry, while others were despatching,
Or if he drank 'twas to Igerna mainly;

The minstrels hymned her charms as past the matching,
But health and song and eye attacked her vainly;
She gazed up at her lord in guileless pride,
Thinking the homage offered to his bride.

And when they brought her dishes from the king,
She turned to Gorlois, and would have him taste;
And when of her the bards began to sing
She felt his stout arm tighten round her waist,
And smiled on him, and on her golden ring,
Whereat awhile his gloomy frown was chased;
At length no more his tongue he might rebuke
To peace, and thus, uprising, spake the duke:

"Sir King! the dawn draws onward to the day,
The torches to my eyes burn something low,
The wine grows sour, and harsh the minstrel's lay;
I pray your grace to give us leave to go:
Ere night I would be well upon my way,
And weary women needs must travel slow;
My lady fain would gather strength by sleep,
That we may quicker reach our Cornish keep."

The king, at first who listened with a smile,
In stammering haste broke in, from lips all white,
"How can we miss the prop of all the Isle?
If lights burn dim, more need that eyes be bright;
If our poor harpers can no more beguile,
List to thy lady's voice, and win delight;
If gall there seem within the wine or meat,
Taste thou her lips, I warrant they be sweet!

"Small courtesy it is to fly thine host
As if his wearying demanded rest,
If for Igerna it concern thee most,
Our house hath bowers, and hers shall be the best;
I swear that to the eve of Pentecost
To feast and sport abideth every guest;
Then, Cornwall, think no more to wend thy way,
I charge thee on thy loyalty thou stay!"

Quoth Gorlois, twitching of his russet beard,
"Stay he who will! I go, in strife or peace;
I will not that my one ewe lamb be sheared
By any thief who roves to seek a fleece;
No stranger by her sporting shall be cheered,
Nor feasts she wolf; here is no queen of Greece!

Though she be fair as Bathsheba of old,
Of me the Hittite's tale shall ne'er be told!

"Here have I those to back me, stark and stout,
Wait but my word this wanton town to wreck!"
With that he wound his stalwart arm about
The trembling girl who hung upon his neck,
Leapt from the table, and, with one great shout,
His Cornish men closed round them at his beck,
And through the portal like a gust of wind
Rushed the wild duke, with all his force behind.

Fast from the throne himself hath Uther hurled,
To follow after and fetch back the prize,
His yellow hair a-bristle whence it curled
About his neck—blood-red his sea-deep eyes,
And loud he cries, "Why rests my banner furled?
Why sit ye still and gape? for shame arise!
Or stay ye here while I alone fare forth
And bring my lady back to price your worth!"

The crowd, who gazed astonished, stirred below,
Each seeking of his neighbour where to wend;

One asked what ailed the king? one, who his foe?
More, what had chanced Duke Gorlois to offend?
A few, who knew the feud, to move were slow;
"Should we not each," they thought, "our fam(
defend?"
Happy themselves in richness of the hearth,
They hasted not to work another's dearth.

But now their ruler must not stand alone,
Come weal or woe, come right or any wrong;
Begins a clank of steel, the tables groan
Beneath their hands who press them; rising strong,
Squires seek their arms, the bearded prophets moan,
Bending to raise on high the gathering song;
A moment more had shown the opening day,
End of a feast, beginning of a fray.

When, as wild Uther strode between the tables,
Came one and grasped him fearless by the arm,
Holding him as strong ships by slender cables
Are held from dashing of themselves on harm;
His voice, like those sea witches of old fables,
Bound the stout limbs from moving with its charm;

His puny frame beside the monarch's bulk
Showed like a pinnace by a battle hulk.

This was Caradoc's son who stopped the fray,
Ulfin by name, of small and slender make;
Though young in years, long locks of dapple gray
Hung round his dull white face, and like a snake
His eyes were round and cold, men wont to say
They yearned to bless themselves whene'er he spake,
Yet he was shrewd of counsel, and they hung
Upon his words; thus spake the silver tongue:

"What ails the mighty son of Constantine?
Whither away in such a Bedlam mood?
Must the new sun upon thy dragon shine
Because a parting guest was something rude?
Becomes it thee, for that he scorned thy wine,
To make the very jesters mirthful food?
Let him depart, the churl!" "Yea, let him pack!"
Said Uther, "so he send my lady back!"

"He will not send her," said Caradoc's son,
"I know his jealous mood, but he may bring.

By now his passion its fierce course hath run,
And of his breast hath shame the governing;
Now in his eyes this 'vantage he hath won
Shows but a dearly-bought, light-valued thing.
Cursing his haste and folly, in his hall
He sits by now, and muses on his fall.

"Guard thou thyself from end of his despair,
That he, grown reckless, throw not off thy ties;
Speak but a word, thou easest him of care;
When thy fair word his gnawing doubt belies
He in all haste shall kneeling seek thy chair,
So hast thou ancient vassal and new prize:
Let but thy herald's summons greet his ear,
Charging him of his love to meet thee here.

"Yet it were well, for he thy might hath slighted,
That thou decide condition, time, and place;
Let it be written, that if he invited
Come not in seven days, he find no grace,
But all his lands be forfeit, he indicted,
And thou proclaimed sole heir of all his race:
But at this present publish not the threat,
Lest his rebellious pride submission let."

So counselled Ulfin, and it pleased the king,
He thought to win his love and keep his friend.
Where wert thou then, O lord of visioning,
The only man who warning aid might lend?
Great Merlin! whither didst thou wandering,
Unknowing in thy knowledge, calmly wend,
  Leaving the hothead-chief alone with hell,
  That worked with choicest wand its chiefest spell?

When hell has noble mind in view for prey
Full cunningly its lord dons angel wings,
Then plausibly steps forth in open day,
Knowing his victim shuns all hidden things,
And boldly in his path doth timbers lay,
And round him cords and heavy tackle flings;
  For the brave heart, too sure in willing well,
  Scorns danger seen, and thinks to conquer hell.

And, looking ever for some subtle snare,
Goes on, and stumbles, and is in the deeps,
Then, soiled and dazed, looks on the thorns that tear
With grief desponding, sits him down and weeps;
Whereby it chanceth hell may lose its care,
For only lost is he who lies and sleeps;

But weeping being done the weeper rises,
And walks again, more wary of surprises.

Yet haply stumbles on the nearest log,
Or struggles helpless in the nearest net;
So be he lie not wallowing as a hog,
Or take the bait for food, hell loses yet;
Firm footing is to find around the bog,
Cords are for cutting, though they close beset:
So may he hardly reach his journey's goal,
And wondering rest at last, poor weary soul!

Satan would catch a true and steadfast soul;
He baits his trap, oh, liar! with a friend,
Who, innocent, but working like the mole,
Makes all the footing false, nor knows the end;
Or else the fiend his cunning will enroll
In some one trusted, then who may defend?
Only a faithful lover, who, far-sighted,
Can lift the lost head, guide the mist-benighted.

But Merlin was afar, and Ulfin ruled,
Therefore did Uther trusting take his word;

He sent the herald, then with guile befooled
Kissed the snake-face, and swore upon his sword
"His land is thine, my Ulfin! I am schooled
By thee to wisdom; goodly gear is stored
In little bulk: if he refuse my grace,
Thou shalt be lord of Cornwall in his place."

But Ulfin bowed him down, dissembling joy,
And said, "It must not be, it were unseeming;
Men would aver he sought the duke's annoy:
'Twas of his love; he would not men were deeming—"
In generous wrath the king broke in, "Parfoy!
My sword is witness to my oath, yet teeming
With stranger blood; but Gorlois hither trend,
Thou shalt be duke; I need one faithful friend!"

With that he turned him to his throne again,
Bidding the singers shrill, and wine abound;
Then all arose and drank in mickle pain,
Listening between each draught to hear the sound
Of heralds' trumps, for all of peace were fain,
And longed that in this tossing rest were found.
At last they heard a far-off clarion blown,
That in a far-off flourishing died down.

Half-way the beakers rested, brows were bent,
The tame grew paler, ruddier the wild;
Ah! well a day for Uther's good intent,
Of evil counselling the puling child!
They knew the wary bird would not be hent,
The true man by the false was unbeguiled,
And, wringing hidden hands for coming trouble,
Joyed that such issue waited counsels double,

The harpers rested by their silent strings
To raise the welcoming or gathering song,
The king sat leaning from the dragon wings,
His hot eyes for his ancient friend must long,
And half his heart repented of those things
It thought but now, but half abjured the wrong;
A moment he had spoken, hell were baulked,
But the door swung, and through the herald stalked:

"Sir King! the walls around have heard our cry,
At Gorlois' palace-gates our call is sounded;
Through silent courts and still the echoes fly,
From wall to wall through emptiness rebounded;
Dull are the lattices, the troughs are dry,
No chimneys smoke, in porch no pikes are grounded;

The gates gape idly all to entertain
For Gorlois pricketh west, with slackened rein.

"This know I, when none came to give debate
We knew the hall was masterless, and turned,
When at the eastern wall, by Lud his gate,
A country-seeking menyie we discerned,
And knew the duke, surrounded by his state;
Then spoke I, but thy proffered love he spurned;
Reining his horse, with mocking laugh he swung
His axe in air, and down his gauntlet flung.

"'Go back,' quoth he, 'go back, thou painted jay!
Bearing yon token to thy master kite,
Fly, or I give thee guerdon for thy way,
Our chargers' bridles sharp as tooth can bite;
Tell the hen-harrier he has lost his prey,
The dove is flown; see there, thou caitiff knight!
In yonder litter sleeps my wife; such bed
Must ladies find, when truth the hall has fled.'

"Sounded his trumpeters, the rebel rout
Shouted defiance, closed around the litter,

Through the dark yawning arch the pomp swept out;
With spears advanced they ride, and caps that glitter
Beneath the reddening cressets, yeomen stout,
Whose heads for shoulders than for spikes are fitter.
They passed, I turned, and hither come to thee
To claim redress for this foul infamy!

"By thee alone, O king! the scorn is earned
If this vain malapert go free of schooling;
Into thy herald's soul his taunts have burned;
I hold his words but idle Easter fooling.
Mercy to folly, peace to sloth are turned;
Take up his gauntlet, or lay down thy ruling!
To suffer was no use of thy great line."
"Nay," said the quiet king, "nor is it mine.

"Come hither, Ulfin:" the deceiver rose
From where he closely listening sat behind,
Came to the throne, and knelt, with such a gloze
Of down-dropped eyes as if he will resigned,
While the pale face bent down to him so close,
That golden hair and grey grew intertwined;
The eyes so cold but now grew bright and warm
As ocean kissed by sunlight after storm.

No word, but round about the bended neck,
Outstretching arms, fond Uther clasped his hands;
Better a halter might that throat bedeck;
So still were all, you might have heard the sands
Slipping from glass to glass the time that check;
Still lay the captive in those loving bands,
  Had he one moment caught those tender eyes
  Even his cold heart must himself despise.

Was none the dullest now but knew the fêud,
None the most hopeful but might guess the end,
The king had shown the road must be pursued,
The broad red road whence some must never wend,
All read his hate, all read his purpose lewd,
Knew to worse war that this short truce must tend,
  All too but he knew how his tutor worked;
  He spoke full soft and low, as silence irked:

"Wilt thou be dumb, O wise humility?
Wilt thou not look on him thy wit hath saved?
Thy pupil waits thy praise for his docility,
Thy lord would thank thee, who his fury braved;
I should look down, not thou whose true nobility
Rebuked my vulgar passion while I raved;

Look up on me, and cease my joy's eclipse,
Let eyes of thine meet mine, thy lips my lips!"

Then in the pause, as lights were burning dim,
Ulfin looked up, and knew the king was lost
Just so much of the man was left in him
As beckoned life into his cheek of ghost,
For ruth of whom he held in toilings grim,
Even his cold heart scarce had told the cost;
He shuddered, and let fall his eyes again,
Then Uther spoke in wondering, careful pain:

"Why blenchest thou? Come, warm thee at my heart!"
"I felt as some one strode across my grave,"
Said Ulfin; then a cry made all to start,
As old Urien from his harp 'gan rave,
"Aye! in far Cornwall sharpened is the dart,
Fast fall their footsteps by the western wave!"
So died his voice, anew the king began,
"Arouse thee, Duke of Cornwall! play the man!

"Fill me a draught;"—they filled, the king arose,
"Ulfin, Caradoc's son, I drink to thee!

Great Cornwall's Duke, rest only in this pose
Till thou do homage for estate and fee,
Then rise, and dress thee to drive out those foes
Who keep from thee thy land, my love from me!
Hear, knights! the feast is done, the peace has sped,
The lion roars for prey, and must be fed!"

The glittering dragon towers masterless,
Long lines of red run all along the floor,
Like streams of blood that from the throne them dress
To flood the country from the western door,
As the guests rising after Uther press,
Upstretching whine the hounds, and forth they pour,
Lady and knight alike most eloquent,
Most silent-clamorous, in their mute dissent.

The dawn looked in above the tapestries,
A breathing of the morning breached the porches,
The figures on the arras seemed to rise,
From tower, from whelming wave, from flame that scorches,
Wringing of woven hands, with glaring eyes,
Beneath the flicker of the smoky torches,
From the unstricken harps low wailings crept,
As they by parting angel's wing were swept.

The dawn lay ghostly on the palace tower,
Already through the courts the news had been,
Who looked from turret, or from latticed bower,
Saw the long lances bar the tender green,
The green all blossomed into pride and power,
Scarlet and gold, and vanes flashed fiery sheen,
And when the sun, slow creeping down the wall,
Lit in the yard, he burnished brand and maul.

Thus did the horn of peace give note of war,
Thus ease got care, thus love got love's undoing;
No knight but ready hailed the morning star,
No dame but armed her love, nor thought of suing;
What hearing is for sobs in battle's jar?
What room for private care with war a-brewing?
Say they but helped their lord to work his shame,
I blame them not; let cold-blood sophists blame!

Now is no time, if ever time there were,
For crying out on loyalty in men!
When freedom scarce can breathe the thickening air,
Poisoned with belchings from that murky den
Whence the slime-dragon, howling in his lair,
Seems prompt to burst upon our straining ken,

The many-headed worm, and Freedom flees,
Seeking in vain a second Hercules.

When each rude hand of traitor or of clown
Is stretched to scatter the red rose's pride,
When pale grow all the rubies of our crown,
When our green oak, that was so fair and wide,
Rocks to the storm with creaking boughs and brown,
And the shore softens with the rising tide,
When all held holy, true, or choice of yore,
Lewd tongue must question, and vain hand explore.

The fire-red dragon, the pale ashen steed,
The antelope, the leopards, all are dead;
The king of beasts came forth to claim his meed,
To quench his craving thirst their blood was shed;
But now, how lieth he in hour of need!
Must he too pass, what might when his has fled?
The lion lieth sick, and herds of asses
Flout him with throat and heel, the scandal passes!

The lion lieth sick; in fevered slumber
He dimly knows the passing of his glory;

How idly that huge bulk the earth doth cumber,
How weak are those great limbs that wrought his story!
And quacks throng round about him past the number,
While ever fainter grows the monarch hoary;
Shall this his sleep be death, or medicining?
Fit him for earth, or nerve to newest spring?

O lion! whilome champion of the right,
O wave-watched lion of the oak forest!
Shall thunder never come to kill the blight?
Woe for thy palsy counterfeiting rest!
Woe for the glut that stays thee from the fight!
Woe for the harrying of the raven's nest!
Woe for each royal whelp who nursed thine age,
Flung forth by thee to sate the jackal's rage!

High up the clouds are gathering in the sky,
The royal limbs twitch strongly through the sleeping,
The levin-bolts are stored, the waking nigh,
New sap along the withered boughs is leaping;
The lion shall arise, the asses fly,
With traitor jackals into shelter creeping.
At worst he, maddening to a dying spring,
Shall crush his foes, and falling fall a king.

The ravens brood o'er blesséd Avalon,
Why stays he, the king-raven, from our shore?
Is it not time the shattering lightning shone
To free the prophet from the oaken core?
Is it not time, when valour's race is run,
And truth and manhood rule not any more,
That Arthur come, to band the faithful few
Who wait a leader, kingship to renew?

His land is still the same; the plains have corn,
The streams sing seaward, and the mountains pray;
In holy Glastonbury still the thorn
Blossoms upon the very Christmas-day,
Laughing the little arts of men to scorn,
Who thought with pens strong Nature's course to stay.
Poor Gotham folk! forsooth the year must wax
And wane with altering of your almanacks!

Come, Arthur! end the reign of craft and guile,
Though thy new coming earth's last shrouding weaves:
Let psalm again wake old Iona's isle,
The sweet white cloud curl round those holy eaves;
Let the great wave gulf down the Fated Isle,
Washing the crimson from the shamrock's leaves;

Only do thou from out this shameless peace
Bring healing war, from war that broughtest ease.

Thus lust and treason worked this war's beginning,
Whose end by love and soothfastness was crowned.
The midnight prowler from his sieve of sinning
Haphazard sowed mixed seed in wholesome ground,
Yet in the harvest tares that lacked of thinning
Choked the good grain, in noisome tendrils bound;
But in long years came this, as yet the bride,
Unclipped of man, doth lone in litter ride.

But late the king must weep, and early wring,
Cursing the ever-weaving fingers deft;
From his life's fruit the bloom hath taken wing,
Only the dull use of the pulp is left,
No other friend shall any future bring,
Alone he lives, of solacing bereft,
Alone for evermore, whate'er befall,
Mute or in mirth, in closet or in hall.

Oh sing no more of Love as wanton boy,
The son of Beauty, blind, or feather brained,

Who wields his bow but as an idle toy,
With shafts by chance, or sport, at random rained,
An imp who works for woman man's annoy,
Whose end by gain is lost, by losing gained;
This child is only one of Love's light pages
Who apes his lord, the elder than all ages.

Before the vapours crowned Olympian tops
Love sat above the earth his bow to bend,
Before the reign of Saturn and of Ops
Love was, Love is, and Love shall see the end:
How goes he? with true eye that often drops,
With strong hand that oft quivers, hard and hend,
A grave and steadfast youth untouched of years,
With subtle laughter in his voice and tears!—

Hath many sons; on Chance he got Desire,
On Beauty, that vain boy's beatitude
Who mocks his state; he is the lawful sire
Of Truth, whom he begot on Gratitude;
But sooth to say their lineage would tire,
Are they not known?—the telling were but platitude;
Name we alone his firstborn, his delight,
Begot of Mystery, and Friendship hight,

Ah Friendship! potency most masculine,
That scarce on woman deign'st to turn an eye,
The only god, as sages well divine,
That, ruling life, dost rule as though we die,
Friendship that makest soul for soul to pine,
Without account of state, or low or high,
Without account of body, foul or fair,
Art thou that Love himself, or but his heir?

If Love be truth, what causeth such a showing
Of close hearts' secrets as the love of friends?
If Love be knowledge, where is any knowing
Like theirs who work to shape each other's ends?
If Love be service, pity ever flowing,
Thought that prevents, or will that willing bends,
Where may such service, care, or charity
Be found on earth as in true friendship be?

Seek thou to friendship—yet in very sooth
Doubt is if that thy quest shall end in finding!
Heart must to heart leap forth, or long-tried truth
Must draw the twain to bind in closest binding
Of living growth; as green in age as youth
Through the long lanes of life that stem goes winding,

To bloom at last in Heaven's native air :—
Hell is most hell because no love is there !

If friendship find thee, happy is thy lot,
Because no longer lonely wandering
Thou shalt seek skyward,—and remembering not
The pain of ills, because the venomed sting
Is healed by touch of hearts, than which, God wot,
No deeper charm e'er dwelt in touch of king !
If friend be none below—yet look on high,
And claim thy Brotherhood right fearlessly !

Book II.

Full loudly sings the cuckoo through the night,
The hours are all too short for half his lay :
The nightingale sings louder for despite,
Lest any waking hear ; wakes every fay ;
The great harts all uncrowned grow meek of might,
Lamb groweth sage, yet still hath lust to play ;
Like draws to like, up stream the salmon slide,
And fast and fair comes in the Whitsuntide.

Faded and dull is all the Paschal white,
And Whitsuntide comes in in sanguine weeds;
Red are the fields as with a sudden blight,
Red runs the river through the river reeds,
Where soared the lark, now hover crow and kite,
Where grazed the lamb, the wolf now prowls and feeds;
Pike heads for flowers peep out among the sedges,
And sharper points than thorn from all the hedges.

Aloft the mountain grasses fall and rise
Like tossing manes of snowy elfin horses,
The shadows of the silver butterflies
Flit silently across the golden gorses,
Below are clash of steel, and jarring cries,
And wringing of white hands above the corses
That lie unburied for the lack of men;
Calm on the hills, and storm in every glen.

The tender sprouting brake is stiff and bloody,
The shepherd's crook must keep the shepherd's head;
The thorns that stud the downs, in sunset ruddy,
Have such a show as if self-pierced they bled,
The sages of the land have left to study,
The women leave to spin, or knead the bread,

The beasts go masterless, the ploughshares rust,
While herd and hind or slay or bite the dust.

For now hath Uther drawn into the west,
Now is the dragon's horrid crest unveiled,
Low lie the fields, by flying footsteps pressed,
By blazing holt and fold the dirge is wailed,
And curses fill the mouths that lately blessed,
Seeing who should have guarded hath assailed;
As if a shepherd meek a witch-wolf grew,
And, maddening, of his whilome treasure slew.

Three morrows' mornings saw the gathering host
Awake from street-spread couch around the tower;
The fourth beheld the banners as they tossed
Above the willows, and the elder flower,
And his fair face, who, counting not the cost,
But mindful only of desire and power,
Rode forth a-wooing in such savage sort,
With beacon fires to light him to his sport.

Meanwhile went Gorlois with his guarding host,
Two days and nights, through good and evil hap;

Nor stayed to kindle fire, nor flesh to roast,
Nor rest his head upon his lady's lap;
At the third dawn he sniffed the nearing coast,
By noon he saw his heavy banner flap
  Above Tintagel by the western main,
  And saw the sea waves twinkle, and drew rein.

Forth stepped Igerna from her litter bed,
All pale but owning nought, she thought it meet
That wife of warrior should eat warrior's bread,
And match his footing, though his foot were fleet;
Full stately did she first the drawbridge tread,
And all her waiting maidens sweetly greet,
  Yet failed she as they reached the castle stair,
  That in his arms her lord her must up-bear.

There rested they; and ever chieftains came
To counsel with the duke in this his plight.
So when three days were done, uprose the dame
And gat her to the topmost turret height;
She looked around—the hills were all aflame,—
And shuddering clasped her hands to hide the sight,
  But looked up as she felt an arm of might
  Go strongly round her waist, and kissed her knight.

They looked out, they two standing there alone,
And all around the night, and in the bay
They heard the rising waters call and moan
Against the rocks, they heard the breezes play,
They saw the long lights on the waters thrown
From loophole and from lattice; far away
The warder's tread seemed near, it was so still;
Then spake the duke, and showed each flaming hill:

"What ails my wife? thou shudderest as with cold,
Yet blows no night wind, nor doth spray spring here;
Well watched and strong around thee is the hold,
Why name I that? thou know'st not paltry fear!
And see on every point and up the wold
How the bright beacons flicker, warm and clear;
These be our bridal torches, dear my dame!
Duke Gorlois' wedding asks no meaner flame.

"Press close, O love; I may no more dissemble,
Now, even now, the foe knocks at our gates;
Nay, feel mine arm, (poor dove, how thou dost tremble!)
But for its lifting all my clan awaits
Around my threatened banner to assemble:
That hot-head boy hath summoned all estates,

And hither comes, in new-made kingship's pride,
To steal for leman his old comrade's bride.

"Therefore this day have we held high debate,
For all the chiefs were summoned yester-eve,
How best we might encounter adverse fate,
How foil the knight and knave who seek to thieve,
The one my life, the other mine estate,
The devil catch that other! yet I grieve
That caitiff son should shame a sire so bold,
Caradoc's counsel saves whom Ulfin sold.

"Three miles away beyond yon swelling hill,
Dimilioc, three walled, withstands the foe;
Into that fort, to ward the coming ill,
With two parts of my vassals must I go,
A third part, picked of all, shall guard thee still,
Whom here in strong Tintagel I bestow.
Kiss me; what cheer, my love? and let me go;
My charger champs the bit, tight reined below."

He stooped to kiss her, and she bended back
Her head to kiss him in a steadfast awe;

Although her heart-strings tightened like to crack,
The fount of tears was frozen past a thaw;
She thought, "My tide of life grows foul with rack,
Now in my crystal spreads the widening flaw;
Yet shall he find a woman to his wife,
No useless fool, to shriek, and blunt his knife."

She said but these few words, "Tintagel hold
Looks westward out upon the tumbling sea,
Each other side the clinging rocks enfold,
Then go in peace and take no thought of me;
Thy warders are full sure, nor steel, nor gold
The chaining of the drawbridge shall let free;
Until I hear thy voice bid watchers sleep
Nor man nor devil wins into the keep."

So he went forth, and she through many days
Held by her fastness on the sea-kissed rock,
Hearing uncertain rumours of his praise,
Faint echoes of the far-off battle's shock;
By night she saw the distant summits blaze
With smoke wreaths that by day the clouds would mock;
Not Israelite of old watched cloud and fire
More eagerly, that led to his desire.

Fair are the downs that seaward skirt the vale
Where strong Dimilioc guards the Cornish leas,
Fending the stunting spray and wrecking gale,
So that green, wide, and scathless grow the trees,
Climbing about the swelling of the dale
Like children clustering at a giant's knees,
  While through the birches o'er the rocks there flow
  A thousand streams to glad the fields below.

And where the rocks halt in their upward march
The wild lawn spreads itself to lap the sun,
Becrowned at first with some stray boughs of larch,
Then short green turf, and then the moorland dun,
That knows no colour save the rainbow's arch,
And is content, such colour hath it won
  From that fair-wooing lover, who hath kissed
  The brown face into blushing through the mist.

Green gorse, all gold bedropped, beneath whose thorns
The violets were hidden, but for scent,
And honeysuckle with her sugared horns
Where spring the trees, and 'twixt the gorses, bent,
And harebells, and such flowers as moderns scorn,
As being with this earth too much besprent,—

This gentle earth, which men who nought discern
Despise, and yet of heaven think to learn!

When night sank down upon the Cornish wold
The king lay all asunder from his train
Upon a hillside; there his limbs he rolled
Among the bracken sweet with yester-rain,
Pressing his hot hands deep into the mould,
And his hot face as he would cool his brain;
And "Oh!" he mourned, "Igerna, Gorlois' dame!"
And "O Igerna!" from his heart of flame.

Nor rest, nor coolness; with wide open eyes
He sat up and gazed out on hill and dale;
He heard the sentry's trump, the challenge, rise
From where beneath his camp-fires lit the vale,
And answering trumpet call, and alien cries
Came from Dimilioc upon the gale;
And "Oh," he mourned, "Igerna! must my bed
Be ever void, because this duke is wed?

"Oh tender breast, that I must never clip!
White hand! that never felt my fingers toy;

Alas! sweet mouth that never lip to lip
Must mate with mine in honey-making joy;
Oh, most dear lady! bitter-sweet, one sip
We took, and love is poisoned ere he cloy;
What grief like mine, for life and realm undone,
Who curse my love, and yet would have her won?

"Not me alone, but all our hapless sex
The craft of woman traps, since Mother Eve.
First their fair-seeming doth our wits perplex,
And while we maze, we perish, no reprieve!
Among the rocks of life they wait for wrecks,
Where luring spells with eye and voice they weave;
They tell of rest, we think of bygone toil,
And our white bodies make the witches' spoil.

"Ah! fair Prince Troilus, Troy's worthy knight,
How wast thou lost, by love of lewd Creseid!
Dan Anthony! was not thy death bedight
Through love of her who left thee in thy need?
And hath not man of woman still despite?
For them we sport, they smile to see us bleed,
Each claps her chosen till a stronger comes,
We look for grace, and see but downbent thumbs.

"Then some astonied sit them down to die,
And some die hard, and cursing maids and wenches,
And some run mad, and board them where they lie,
And wreak their fury on the smiling benches;
The strongest break the mesh, the points put by,
And find their safety; thus the white hand wrenches
At the red heart, and so much of divine
As each heart holds, so spouts the life in wine.

"I had a friend, I had my heart in keeping,
I had my people's love, and so was rich;
My friend turns foe, my heart uncurbed is leaping,
My people curse me by each corpse-choked ditch.
Blinded with watch-fires, deaf with noise of weeping,
I turn again, and curse thee, dark-eyed witch!
Rest thou unharried by thy western brine,
Though thou be Circe, know in me no swine!

"Behold, I cast off these thy trammellings,
Let Caros or Caradoc claim my crown;
This turmoil for some peace, care, haunting kings
Through gain or loss, for ease will I lay down;
Peace in the desert foldeth her white wings
To wait me, leaving pall for russet gown

To her I fly!" "And whither wouldst thou fly,"
Whispered a voice, "but where Igerne doth lie?"

As one who, seeking berries, on a toad
Unknowing lays his hand, doth start and quake,
Partly for fear of what the thing may bode,
But most for loathing, and to flight would take,
Yet stays irresolute for pride,—so strode
The king to meet the speaker, half awake;
And whose cold eye now meets him with that sneer,
But Ulfin's, whence he crouched upon his spear?

"Why rests he here," drawled on the mocking voice,
"Our youthful Saul, to hide among the fern
Like beaten hart? is this the people's choice?
He for whose bedding yonder summits burn?
He who in bridal chamber should rejoice
Thinketh he on the threshold to return?
Is this a son of Brut, of Helen's kind?
How to thy suckling stole the snowy hind?"

"Aye, son of Brut am I, and Helen's son.
Just as my father, as my mother pure!

Deceiver, know thy spell's enchantment done,
That thing I said is said, I will endure
All penance so my land's distress be done,
So that no more my lady they immure,
  So that thy lying counsels never more
  Trick whom thou shouldst have saved, thy friend of yore!"

All coldly answered Ulfin, "Aye, 'tis just!
This was the meed of service from the first;
Did I then fire thy wanton limbs with lust?
Or brim the cup whence thou didst quaff this thirst?
Did I drag Britain's banner through the dust,
So that all there had laughed, had any durst?
  Counsel thyself henceforth, rage out thy fill,
  Nor dream that I again will curb thy will!

"Yet pity moves me, poor self-tortured boy!
To think of those white limbs beneath the scourge,
Those golden locks, where fingers wont to toy,
Shorn off, that sweet voice moaning psalm and dirge;
Sloes will be sweet, no doubt, when apples cloy,
And doubtless love is sin that prayer must purge;
  Yet pity 'tis—and for my cherished plan
  Is pity too—but thereto needs a man.

"So will I seek a king; yet ere I go,
Committing to thy saintship's prayers my sins,
'Twere fitting what thou leavest thou shouldst know,
He who leaves little, little glory wins.
Mine aid, say'st thou, hath cumbered thee below,
Yet own me Jacob clad in Esau's skins
As I assist thy martyrdom of flesh,
Showing how for thy prey I wove the mesh.

"Knowest thou where Igerna keeps her state?
Dream not she shelters in Dimilioc;
No room for bridal bed where soon and late
The sentries' tramp becomes the watchers' clock;
No time for lovers' talk where pulleys grate,
And bowstrings twang, and cords shriek thro' the block;
Hast thou not heard how all our time we waste
Besieging him, who to her siege should haste?

"She watches from her bower the waves that sweep
From ceaseless distance to her castle wall,
Where grim Tintagel tops the guarded steep
And holds her safe, whatever him befall;
Light watch she sets, since to the inner keep
Three men abreast may scarce pass to the wall,

The rocks so heap themselves on every side;
Yet had I found who might have been thy guide.

"I knew thy love was hopeless, thought it true,
So sought to aid by might of gramarye;
And here to-night came one who well I knew
Could sorrow change to joy, for thee and me;
For since I dreamed that I among the few
Thy heart held dear, fond fool, I bled for thee;
But now what need, farewell,—upon the hill
Though Merlin waits beside to work our will."

A true heart trusteth ever, though deceived,
And, blamed for answering love with greeting rude,
Grows sick with fear of falsehood, and is grieved
Lest it in aught hath failed of gratitude,
Then, counting up all benefits received,
Forgetting those conferred, and doubt eschewed,
Will seek to grace, although it have no blame;
Such was young Uther's heart, and thence his shame.

Poor boy! he looked up very piteously,
Hearing a torrent of upbraiding words;

He was so weary, so his heart might be
Anchored again he recked not with what cords;
He only heard how one reproachfully
Spoke of love unrepaid, and like sharp swords
The saying pierced; he stammered like a child,
"Forgive me, Ulfin, were my words so wild?

"Yet thou dost know this war had ne'er been set
But for thy teaching."—Ulfin turned about,
"My teaching, truly! dost thou then forget
How I unwilling at thy feet did lout,
While thou thy hands upon my shoulders set,
Till for thy kiss I clean forgot my doubt,
And took this dukedom? go, malign thy friend,
As use the pious; I with Merlin wend!

"Storm thou thy heaven, I, to softer rape!
Clasp thy sweet self, and know Igerna mine!"—
"Thine!" shrieked the king upleaping, "thine, thou ape.
By priest or pandar, how? at what foul shrine
Dost dream to bind her thine? a goodly jape!
How long since men began for skulls to twine
A Maying wreath! Enough, there was some word
Of Merlin; let him come, he shall be heard."

The stars that swing low down in southern sky,
That men now clepe Orion, faint and pale,
Where the great cloud rack 'gan to break and fly
Before the south-west wind, looked o'er the vale,
The mists began to rise, and sluggishly
Rolled up in wreaths before the rising gale;
Beneath the pointing of the three-gemmed belt
Loomed out a presence less beseen than felt.

A tall straight shape, a wearied, furrowed face,
That mused on its beginning and its end,
Grew into knowing, as with lagging pace
Toward the pair the seer his way did wend,
Merlin the old, long born of fated race;
Before the king he stood, nor knee would bend,
But as the king leapt to him bent his head
As blessing him, and "Hail my king," he said.

"Merlin! thou knowest all my love and loss."
"These," said the sage, "and thy resolve I know."
"Tell not of that," quoth Uther, "let the cross
Shield whom the blade no more may keep from foe;
Tell me of baffled guard and useless fosse,
Tell how I may, unknown, my lady know,

Speak on of love, or stint." In solemn wise
Thus spake the demon-born with angel eyes :

" Not all unknown thy sorrows were, O king!
Nor aught unpitied was thy tortured state ;—
When Easter bells in London town did ring,
I sat alone by Salamanca's gate,
And in the deep dark pool I, wondering,
Read of thy trouble, and thy future fate ;
On bat-hewn wing I hither, in all haste,
To aid thee have returning swallows chased.

" Short rede ; if thou wilt hold thy love in arm,
Nought hinders thee, nor is no man may let;
I shall around us three weave such a charm
As shall beguile the warders—foresight yet
Works in my mind, as in dry flour the barm,
Telling of all the woe thou must beget
Upon this deed ; nathless I will rehearse
That thou shalt do, if that thou fear no curse.

" The pickets all shall lie as dead asleep
As though the death-coin pressed each drowsy lid,

We three will pass the rock beneath the keep,
Our feet unchecked the ringing way shall thrid,
And to Igerna's arms thyself shalt leap,
Undoubting welcomed; yet who seethes the kid
In milk of its own mother resteth banned,
And such a deed were this; 'tis featly planned.

" For, glamoured to all sight thyself shalt go
Seeming the duke, in Gorlois' form complete,
And Jordan of Tintagel men shall know
In me, their hoary lord, and joyful greet,
And for this Ulfin, round him I will throw
The shape of crooked Brice who carves the meat;
Lord, seneschal, and page shall enter in
Unchallenged, thus the thread the sisters spin."

In little mind aye resteth vanity;
Thus Ulfin, who, because of puny size,
Chafed 'neath the jeers of all humanity,
Grew in such wrath it well nigh fired his eyes.
Quoth he, "A plague upon the seer's urbanity!
Sure larger growth befits such enterprise!"
Answered the seer, " To alter fate's behest
I have no spell; let petty petty rest."

Then up and spake the king, "Play out the play!
Merlin, lead on, and show us of thy skill;
This venture shall be tried ere break of day.
To-morrow's midnight sees me take my fill
Of love and vengeance, spite the narrow way,
Or sees my blood lay curse upon this hill!"
The seer replied, "'Tis done! yet bide awhile,
And hear, O king! the fruit of this thy guile.

"For think not thou, thus sowing evil seed,
To reap no after-crop, nor he, thy son,
Who lieth yet loin-hidden; this thy deed
Shall bring great grief to Britain being done,
Great glory first, for wholesome fruit indeed
Thou fosterest unknowing, heedless one!
But grief outdoing gladness: hear my tale,
So that, not blindly, but without a scale

"Thine eyes may track the pathway from the east
That leads thee to thy love; and ponder well,
Is this one love, of every love the least,
So rich that it may pay thee for that knell
Thy hand shall ring? the love that ruleth beast?"
Answered the king, "Not torment of hot hell

Can pass my torment; let the morrow take
Care for the morrow!" Slowly Merlin spake:

"At Salamanca, by the western gate,
There stands a tower in the stony carse,
Fashioned long since by Virgil, lord of fate,
Whom yet his slave devoured, of yellow brass;
Twelve figures on the ramparts ever wait,
Each gazing motionless upon a glass;
Within there hangs of iron bells a ring,
Which never mortal hand hath set a-swing.

"He must be wholly saint or half a sprite
Who hears those mystic chimes give forth a knoll:
Tongueless they hang, yet sometimes in the night
The hermit sains himself to hear them toll;
Or, listening from his quiet turret's height,
The wizard marks with blood or milk his scroll;
All things in life or death these eight can tell,
From where they loom above the silent well.

"Nor beam, nor traverse, spoil of earth or trees,
Divides the blackness of the inner space;

The scalers of that height need no degrees,
Nor ask their floating feet a resting-place;
Who looks aloft, eight hollow circles sees,
Who looks below, sees where there interlace
  Stone circles eight that through the pavement creep
  Around a tank, three-sided, still, and deep,

"Wherein the stars by night, and eke by day,
Shine through a trap like-figured in the roof
Around the battlements in grim array
The twelve stern figures, each from each aloof,
Watch their twelve mirrors, the foretellers they
Of what the coming months shall stamp with proof;
  Each New Year's Eve they toss their hands, or wring,
  Each guardian at his month's foreshadowing.

"Now on the last year's latest night I waited
Beneath the brass to see what should befall:
With me was silent night, but, space-abated,
Came light and clamour from the city wall,
These ceased and died, then on mine ear there grated
One sullen clang that shook the ringing hall,
  The first great figure stirred, and east and west
  Flung wide exulting arms, and sank to rest.

"So were the second and the third bested;
But lo! the fourth began in frantic wise
To tear the heavy curls that clothed his head,
And wring his hands, and press them on his eyes,
And was anon as still as are the dead,
And all the others held the selfsame guise,
Till stillness once again held one and all;
Then once again that clang hummed round the hall.

"Wherewith I swooned; but early on the morrow,
When birds 'gan cheep, and human voices sing,
From the new sun some comfort might I borrow,
And rising, citywards went murmuring—
'The first three dwell in joy, then cometh sorrow
At waking of the fourth,' the time took wing,
Till Easter-day led in the month of fear,
Then to that hall I hied to read the sphere.

"Therein I waited through the Easter-day;
Within the town were chime and choral sound,
But silence was around me as I lay
Waiting to hear the hollow bells ring round,
Or till their toll should banish hope away;
Fasting I lay along the figured ground,

Gazing if anywise the sullen pool
Might, clearing, to the master prove a school.

"The stars beneath me flickered into fire;
At length slow sailing into sight the Wain
Flashed from the darkness, then with strong desire
I clutched the stones, while either eye did strain
To see if that brought burden glad or dire,
My face half met the water, but in vain
I watched and listened; all at once from far
I heard the midnight chimes begin their jar.

"And as they ceased, with one wild clashing peal
My bells rang round, and died into a knell;
The sullen pool was stirred, but not to heal,
The waters boiled as with a witch's spell,
The cold spray sprung,—I shrank its touch to feel,
I, the fiend-born, the son and lord of hell!—
Then shrank and cleared, and in that sorry glass
I saw the pageant of the ages pass.

"I saw thy feast, O king! I saw thee rise
To wreck thy weal, I saw thy banners toss,

This bitter struggle, all the agonies
Of broken Britain saw I, and the loss;
I saw the stars that now with steadfast eyes
Look down upon us, and a guarded fosse
By three men crossed, and thee and Gorlois' bride
Lie clasped in arms and kissing, side by side.

"Then of a sudden all the tongueless bells
Took up their tale, with wondrous sort of ringing,
The sound of marriage-peals, that yet were knells,
And all the air was full of shrieks and singing;
I saw one topple from the seaward fells;
Then dimness for a space, then, swiftly winging
Their course across the pool, fled griefs and joys,
While still the bells held on their diverse noise.

"I saw the blood-red dragon rise and thrive,
And gather round him such a fair menyie
As never man in shroud nor man on live
Hath seen, nor living eye again shall see;
The sword self-forged that must arise to rive
The royal heart, those wailing women three
That rue their victory, and Death's pale horse
Prancing in pride above the dragon's corse.

"The agony of that wild horse, he sank
Beneath the griping of the leopard's claws,
That sprang up stealthily and seized his flank,
Beside the Bloody Lake, with eager jaws;
Then turbid grew the waters of the tank,
And silence was awhile, a little pause,
As if the bells bewildered could not roll,
Wavering between a triple and a toll.

"Too long to say how, when the waters cleared,
I saw the story of this fated isle,
To me by mother's milk at least endeared.
There was a varied pageant, tear, and smile,
Sights to give joy, and shudderings to be feared;
But at the last I saw a holy pile
I knew not, and a huge and mighty king
Who burnt the church, and knells began to ring.

"A little while, and through the silent wave
One face held all, without a trunk,—a head
With hollow eyes, most tender and most brave:
Around the brow a silver light was shed;
I name him for a saint, though men may rave,
And scorn his prayers who speaks when cold and dead,

He shall be saint;—the bells with one consent
Rang out a muffled peal with tolling blent."

The king rose up impatient: "Gifted seer!
We wait thy words of wisdom; what is this,
This tale of beasts and saints, that holds us here
When by the waters lies expectant bliss?"
"Awhile, O king! anon there cometh fear,
Thou shalt not with the sinless lover kiss
Till thou hast heard what is to be revealed,
What thy wild hand hath signed, thy lips have sealed.

"I saw a rock, encircled by the wave,
Whereon there couched a comely lion whelp,
The while that tyrant's foe and tyrant's slave
Hallooed him on from far, or prayed his help;
And he lay still, no laggard, but most grave,
While round his feet washed wave and floated kelp,
And thence he gathered sustenance and strength,
Until a king full grown he rose at length.

"There was a vulture in the southern part,
That vexed a lesser lion, faint and old,

Who, roaring from his castle, told his smart
Unto his younger mate, who now grown bold
Leapt suddenly, and tore the vulture's heart,
And bore him to a barren cliff and cold,
To scream and flap his noisome life away,
Stalked back, and slept, and all things owned his sway.

" Again I saw him wake with throes and flings,
Lashed into madness by a swarm of bees
That crept from underneath the vulture's wings
And stung him, till he, half afraid of ease,
And wholly blinded by the reptile stings,
Went forth to battle; floating on the breeze
Above him waved the banner of a knight,
The great Red Cross, to bless the coming fight,

" Most sorrowful! the great Red Cross went forth
To aid the desecration of the cross.
Most guileless brave, the guardian of the north
Heard that a stronger made the weaker's loss,
And struggling with the bear, so great his worth
Maimed him, and all the bees took brighter gloss,
Bathed in the blood; but that sad lion crept
Sore crippled to his rock, and sank, and slept;

"Slept, and grew lean and haggard, and around
There rose a pack of foxes whence he lay,
That gnawed him, while he slept as one spell-bound,
Tearing him piecemeal; and the beasts 'gan say,
'This lion dies; be other ruler found!'
And the strong rock seemed crumbling to decay:
But now my bells into a tocsin broke,
And all the pool grew dim with rising smoke.

"I saw the lion, bleeding, staggering,
Rise up and stretch his foot, and then, no more,
For all grew dark,—yet heard I sabres ring,
And dying snarl, and slowly strengthening roar,
And all the bells began to change and swing
Like joy-bells, and I knew the peril o'er;
Yet sat down silently, with shielding hand
Before mine eyes, to weep for mine own land."

He ceased, and there was silence for awhile;
The king, awe-stricken, mused on that he heard,
While Ulfin watched him sideways with a smile,
And thought, "Yet is my triumph still deferred;
How rule I but this corner of an isle?
What lack I to men's eyes but mantle furred

To make me fair,—but staff and golden ring?
A lord may limp, but stately steps the king."

Then darkling, and without a spoken word,
The three joined hands, and severed, and they went
Over the hill by whin, and brake, and sward,
Where the thick mist had jewelled every bent;
The stars were waning now, and drew toward
The eastern limit of the firmament;
It was that hour when swoons the elder day
In death, and yet the new hath claimed no sway.

Down plunged the wizard with his followers twain,
Between the rocks, between the rowan trees
That waved their disenchanting boughs in vain,
Past the stone circle, smooth with witches' knees
That bend before their altar at Beltane;
By stony path, and smooth alike with ease
They went, hell aided, o'er the slippery stones
Round which the cloud-fed torrent ever moans,

Till Merlin caught a bough of elder tree,
And swung down, they two following, to a dell;

A little lawn their staring eyes might see,
From prying sight on all sides guarded well;
High banks of bush and rock were ramparts three,
And for the fourth no mortal eye might tell
If this were rock or wood that might be cloven,
So thick the trees with underwood were woven.

Towards the north there rose a rocky wall,
Whose top was crested with thin birchen leaves;
Behung it was as with a woodland pall
With dark-green weeds and moss, like that which cleaves
Upon a ruined roof, as though its fall
It would arrest, and stop the gaping eaves;
All clotted was the green with drops that fell,
Slow-plashing, in a little darksome well:

Whence never sallied stream to feed or play,
But still and fathomless its waters kept,
No fuller, and no deeper; night or day
No beam upon that water danced or slept;
Around the brim fat growth, and lichen gray
Clung to the stones, and tendrils round it crept
That bore black deadly fruit; the rising gale
Now swept the hill, and prisoned moaned in vale.

There were no stars, but all above black night.
Then Merlin plucked him herb, and broke him boughs,
And laid his spoil together. "King and knight!"
Quoth he, "beware lest either cross your brows;
Down to the well and drink, for this our rite
Demands libation, come—a deep carouse!
Thus drink I first." He bent, drank deep and slow,
Whereat the sullen water began glow

As with an inner fire; anon the king
Drank deep and hastily, but Ulfin shrank,
Looked this and that way, then drew near the spring,
And shuddered, and looked round, and hardly drank;
"Enough for doom," said Merlin; and a ring
He drew around his pile, and from the tank
Took drops, and thereon sprinkled, and it leapt
To flame, as all within the circle crept.

Thence might they see by that strange balefire's gleam
The glistening rock unmoved by light as gloom,
And through the hush, like noises in a dream,
Dripped the slow water clock, as measuring doom,
Above upon the hills the gathering scream
Of winds, and far away the sullen boom

From the great turret of Dimilioc,
That told of guard surprised, and battle shock.

Bleed lord or lout, they stood alone, the three,
To work the will of two, the ill of one;
The witch-fire leaping by them ruddily,
All smokeless, curled against the coming sun;
While Uther, watching every gibbering tree,
Looked if his love might through the copsewood run,
While Ulfin shook, and sneered, while all wide hell
Laughed through its breadth, thus spake the seer his spell:

"Dark Moloch! lord of blood; gray Ashtaroth!
Hoar with thy whoredoms, whom our fathers loved;
Quaint Dagon! sea-king, thou who wert so loth
To bend to heaven—now bend; be ye all moved,
Though mortal bid you here be ye not wroth,
We woo you to your realm, who long have roved;
Come forth! be honoured! sway our hearts with fear,
Lo! Helen's son commands your aid, be near!

"Clotho, and Lachesis, and Atropos!
Too long unseated from your fatal chair,

Assume your state, and weave the web across
The lives of those who cry ; ah, Venus fair !
Look down and aid the winning of our loss ;
Dissembling Jove ! help thou this kindred snare
To thy so many snares ; all gods be near,
The son of Constantine commands you here.

" Light-bodied fays that change with every wind,
Unthinking, gamesome, let your hands be nigh !
These fleshy garments from our souls unbind
And weave us such as fit our destiny ;
Leave changing child and mocking wandering hind,
To wait upon great Britain's royalty !
Lend from your manifold and changing shapes
The shapes we need to compass these our japes !

" And thou, Grim Power, dark father of deceit !
Arise, and wrap us in thy mantle dun !
Be night around us, nor his course complete
Until the portal of the keep be won ;
Dread not but thou shalt have thy guerdon meet
A soul thou gettest or the rising sun ;
Strong hell, I, born of thee, command thee here,
To work his will whom yet I hold most dear ! "

The fire had died into a ruddy heap,
Crowned with white ashes, and no one might move
Fresh store of fuel from the boughs to reap;
Then swayed the boughs of all the circling grove,
The dropping well ceased all at once to weep,
And all at once a cry of "Treasure trove"
Ran through the dell, and sound of laughter hoarse,
And that dull water clock renewed its course.

Cymbals in air, and sound of harp and flute
That time lewd dances, and the noise of drums
That beat for sacrifice, and cry of brute,
And oaten pipe outshrieking tabor's thrums,
And voices shrill and sweet in hot dispute
For place, and then a savour of wild gums
That strove to drown a smell of seething flesh,
And conquered, helped by flowers, faint and fresh.

Upleapt the flame, and each one looked on each:
Who was this red-haired duke of forty years
That gazed upon a veteran whose speech
Came slowly forth as his who knows no fears?
Whose this misshapen form defying leech?
Were these the boy who lately wept wild tears

For truth foregone, the old star-reading sage,
The new-made duke,—this chieftain, knight and page?

Three hands were joined, two sturdy, and one weak,
And they went upward to the lightening down,
And set their feet Tintagel's hold to seek,
While all the moor around grew dull and brown;
No word might either to the other speak.
The moon had sunk, the wailing wind had blown,
And the still morning breaking, clear and grey,
Showed to their wakening feet the western way.

Book III.

Where is true wifehood? Is it hers who flits
A summer gnat in endless merriment,
Who, petulant and frolicksome by fits,
Looks on her mate but as a something sent
By providence to spare her scanty wits
The toil of thought, to aid her fancy's bent;
Who goes in triumph while his life is wrecked,
Careless so her sweet self be censed and decked?

Or is it hers, who, woman's glory spurning,
Forgets that Pallas' hand the distaff bears,
And, not for wisdom but dominion yearning,
Forth to the fight in borrowed graithing fares,
Staggering beneath its weight and undiscerning
That she were sped but man in pity spares;
Wedded to her own will, her lord's rejecting,
Nursing her whims, and those she bore neglecting.

Or is that woman proved a perfect wife
Who warms her husband's house and chills his heart,
Making the meat of more account than life,
So that the man must either live apart
And silent, or must head the vulgar strife,
And do her bidding, Pegasus at cart!
Whose thought is measured by her spindle thread,
And all whose cry is but for daily bread.

Nay, nay! Far otherwise in days of eld
The wives were wont to bear them, in the days
When woman held her dignity, nor melled
With what might harden her; their greatest praise
Was womanhood, though Latham's lady held
Her keep against the traitor, though in frays

Of north the Flower of Yarrow served the spurs,
Each wrought because her master's cause was hers.

It was those women who could look on blood
Unshrinking, if need were, and load the guns,
And weave among their maids, and furnish food,
And love their lords, from whom our heart blood runs;
Poor simple fools! They thought to practise good,
And belt the swords upon their long-haired sons,
And spin, and love, and pray, was work of wife,
Yet of such fools came earth's most fullest life.

Such wife was she who held her lonely state
Beside the western water, at whose breast
He drew his life whom early times and late
Have joined to celebrate as Britain's best,
That Arthur whom the Cornishmen await,
The mirror of good knights, who moved the Quest,
Who passed in mystery that mission done,
Last of his line, sped by his graceless son.

Night, from the north, from out the land of graves,
Came slowly pacing, singing as she came;

Bird, beast, and flower that heard her magic staves
Shut wing, and crouched, and folded: void of blame
The quiet herdsman slept, but waked such slaves
As love or sorrow urges, hate or fame,
  Who for their raving cannot hear her songs,
  Still murmuring of their tyrant and their wrongs.

Night, that was Hebe once, a chalice bears
For him to sip who will, a cup full filled
With Lethe water, and with voice of tears
She soothes the mad world like a singer skilled,
She strips her of the mantle that she wears
To wrap them warm who shiver, being chilled
  By earth that closes round them, burying
  Their life, and leaves them life to feel death's sting.

Wet foot from pacing over northern seas
The Night came down upon the English land;
Her feet, her raiment, brushed the grass, the trees,
And they grew damp and cool, the western strand
She reached, and breathed, and there arose a breeze
That rippled all the waters, and her hand
  She raised in blessing, and dropt head and wept,
  And all the earth looked up and smiled and slept.

But evermore the sorrowful great sea,
That in the quiet passing of the day
Weeps for the wanting of eternity,
Waked and bewailed herself—"Shall I, so gay,
So pleasant, the health-giver, cease to be,
And earth that came of me in sunlight stay?
I who love best the light, when ceaseless light
Is shed on earth, shall it not make me bright?"

And all the sea, slow-heaving to the moon,
Lay like the pall above a maiden's hearse,
Blue-black and fringed with silver; very soon,
Beneath the singer's blessing, all the curse
Was clean forgotten, and the singer's boon,
Forgetfulness, was given, and the nurse
Sank into slumber, watching by the child;
Both earth and sea by song of night beguiled.

As all the dusk was mellowing into night
With lagging foot Igerna paced the room;
Her maids beneath the flaring taper's light
Answered each other's song across the loom,
But all their toil might bring her no delight,
And every voice but seemed to tell of doom;

She answered them, appealing, with lost voice
That sounded as afar, and praised their choice,

And praised their song; and neither saw the woof,
Nor knew the words, but only inly thought,
"If I were but alone! How on that roof
The great stones thunder down, with ruin fraught!
Ah, my dear lord, why hold thyself aloof
From her who with herself hath surely bought
The right to cheer thy sorrow? What of rest
For me, far sundered from thy mailéd breast?"

At length, with measured pace and gentle word,
She gat her forth as who alone would pray,
And standing silent for a moment heard
Each loosened tongue break out in fuller play;
Then through long galleries, where arras stirred
With brushing of her robes, she took her way;
With quickened, ever quickening feet she fled
Up the long stair, as followed by the dead.

The little wicket with a hollow clap
Snapped sharp behind her, and she felt the wind

Blow freshly on her face, and heard the flap
Of Gorlois' banner, and the darkness kind
Closed round about her, and she heard the tap
Of armèd heel beneath, and hot eyes blind
With light grew cool with tears, and she stood still,
And wrung her hands at last, and wept her fill;

And, having wept a little, sate her down
Upon the battlement, and gazed below:
"Alas!" she said, "that he were simple clown,
And I a village housewife; we might know
Some peace in wedding; thorns hath bed of down,
But bed of flock hath slumber!"—then the flow
Of waking tide beneath the castle woke,
And called to her with voice that comfort spoke:

Wooing her down, and telling how the bay
Was floored with yellow sand, and how the waves
Brought quiet to whoever willing lay
To take their kiss, and how the ocean caves
Had noble bedding, and how softened day
And midnight glorified, where ocean laves
The inner hidden depths, should ease her pain;
Wooing her down, and wooing not in vain.

For she spread out her arms to take firm hold
Of stones on either side, and stretched her neck
To hear the story that the waters told,
And see the surf, and watch the billows beck,
Watching the waters as they flashed and rolled
Beneath her with white fire, and ceased to reck
Of anything, and almost thought to leap,
And lie at length, and be at peace, and sleep.

And had leapt haply, but a sudden voice,
A laugh, rang out below from one who wove,
A little human sound, and all her choice
Turned back to earth and all her fingers clove
Unto the stones, and angels 'gan rejoice,
For she was saved; she turned her face above,
And 'Mary mother!' nothing more she said,
And heard the waves, but all their spell had fled.

Then she turned round, and took the narrow stair
Back to the world that all beneath her lay;
Content the sorrow of the world to share,
Although she might not share the mirth and play:
She sought the hall again, and seated there
Bade all be blithe and tune the roundelay,

The while she silent wove among her maids
A story of the Saxon's fruitless raids.

So wrought they till the servers served the meat,
And pages ushered her with tapers tall
To sit in lonely state on dais seat
And feign to feast, although untasted all
The cates lay spread before her, and the sweet
Spiced hippocras she sipped as though with gall
Her cup were brimmed; the goblets where they stood
Beneath the lamps she saw, and thought of blood.

Anon at pleading of the chapel bell
They fell to prayer: sweet was Mary's hymn;
So sweet as only heavy heart can tell
That lightens with its song, and weary limb
That rests with kneeling, while sad thought or fell
Flees whence it came, and eyes, grown wide and dim
With misery, are closed, and opening
Show bright again with heaven's burnishing.

Tired hearts to pray, and tired limbs to sleep;
Igerna lay at length with folded hands,

Watching the shadow of her window creep
Along the wall in dark and lightened bands;
Until a dreamless slumber and a deep
Came of that ceaseless ripple on the sands;
She slept, a maiden in her widowed bed,
And Gorlois, he slept well, but newly sped.

So in the waning of the summer night
The winds awoke that harbour in the west,
With one wild blast they burst the keep to smite
On sudden, and each leapt from couch he pressed
To shudder as the room grew blue and bright,
Straight sinking into blackness, each addressed
Himself to pray, because the thunder crash
Spoke death abroad in that new-flickering flash.

Darkness and light and never-ceasing roar,
The hiss of rain against the outer wall,
A sullen thunder on the under shore,
Wind shrieking through the lattice, and the call
Of some ill-omened fowl, and evermore
A clashing as of armour from the hall;
Then thrice, unrung, the great bell of the keep
Tolled out, and all was still, and day 'gan peep.

But tempest shook the land in vain for her
Who lay with crossed hands, smiling through her sleep,
So still and quiet 'mid the sudden stir
One might have thought already in their keep
The angels had her soul; the jar and whir
Around her roused her not to quake or weep:
Storm rose—she slumbered, peace—and still she slept,
And fate with crippled foot still nearer crept.

Dawn on the coast; the spirits of the night,
That all night long delight the sea to roam,
Came hurrying landwards, where the eastern height
Still kept a gloom, to seek their cavern home;
A long low wave sped every spirit's flight,
That plunged and tossed its arching crest of foam
As its light rider leapt upon the sand,
Then sank back seawards, loosed of guiding hand.

And whence the spirits came the western sky
Was all in hue like death-bed marigolds,
One mass of funeral cloud that would not fly
Hung out in middle heaven its sullen folds,
And up above the heaven utterly
Grew out of green to-day; the Cornish wolds

Blushed purple, and the rocks from careless grey
Grew pale with longing for the coming day.

Dawn in the west: a scarce diminished shine
From that full moon that silvered all the deep;
Dawn in the east: a flash incarnadine
That spread the path whereby with stealthy creep
The morning neared that narrow border line
Where earth joins heaven, strengthening for a leap
On those who held his right, a royal red
Fit for his footing, for the conqueror's tread.

Beside a rock they crouched, the traitor three;
A warrior, a greybeard, and a page;
The waste was crossed, and each might sniff the sea,
The downward path was tracked: each held the gage
Of faithfulness in this their treachery,
His fellow's hand—nor might that touch assuage
The heat of Uther, Merlin's solemn grief,
Nor Ulfin's hate; such bond brings no relief.

The narrow way they took, and still as death
They went with downbent eyes, nor either dared

To look on other: only laboured breath,
That told the thought and not the toil they shared,
Broke the cold quiet: lastly underneath
The frowning porch they stood—a trumpet blared
To tell how close Igerna's watch was kept,
One challenged, and the crook-back forward leapt,

With "Place for Cornwall's duke!" and straight the flash
Of torches from the guard-room, and a cry—
"The Duke has come! the Duke!" and sudden clash
Of partisans caught up all hastily,
Slow grating of the windlass, and a crash
Of chains; down sank the bridge, and rising high
The grim portcullis left its arch aglow,
Free both to issuing guard and entering foe,

Three came across the bridge, but when the tower
Was entered, two alone with pallid face
Went side by side—oh! long shall fishers scour
The coast, and long shall warders seeking grace
Of Gorlois wander on the crags that lower
Above the sands, to find the curséd place
Where rests the crooked page, who shrieking fell
Down that wide fosse to find his kindred bell.

For as the sun burst up, and deeds of night
Were finished, Ulfin seeing how the bridge
Sank to his feet, rushed on, the ill-starred wight!
And leapt in exultation to the ridge
Of rocks. "All hail, thou dawn of my delight!"
He cried, and, like the sun be-quickened midge
That joys it for an hour, he tottered, spread
His arms apart, and passed—and Merlin said,

"Enough for doom!"—and there were cries and rushing
Hither and thither of the guards; and some
Peered over to descry the sudden gushing
Of blood beneath, and these for awe were dumb,
And these for fear were clamorous, but brushing
The gazers all aside see Merlin come,
And, quelling tumult with a harsh rebuke,
False seneschal leads in the seeming duke.

Some said, in after years, a grim great hand
Stretched up from darkness as the traitor stood
Upon the rock, and as he took his stand
Clutched both his feet, and dragged him down; his blood
Was everywhere; the rocks, the waves, the sand,
Were red, but nowhere, gathering for food,

The ravens screamed above his writhen limbs;
And all wide hell pealed forth its ruler's hymns

Beside Igerna's couch the night sat still,
In that dim chamber facing to the west,
But all the angels sought their native hill,
And dreams of earth broke in upon her rest;
She dreamed she heard the cocks that challenge shrill
As bells ring in to prime, and she undressed,
Barefoot, walked forth into a meadow gay
Without a fellow to bring in the May.

The cuckoo yet had not begun to stammer,
The lark was gone, and singing out of sight,
The linnet sung, the frugal yellow-hammer
Cried for its meal, the dusky-coloured flight
Of rooks was all above, whose cheery clamour
Told all their care to build their nests aright,
And she, alone, walked barefoot through the mead,
Nor feared lest hidden thorn might make her bleed.

It was a marvel for to see the mead,
Its short green grass all powdered with white knops

Of daisies yet from slumber's bond unfreed,
And every blade bestrung with shining drops;
She watched the shy hares as they stole to feed
Beneath the hedgerows, leaping from the copse,
  Or prick-eared paused in tasting of the stream
  That ringed the meadow, smiling in her dream.

Then saw she, as she stayed to gaze around,
Where stood a miracle; in middle field
There rose a thorn, fast rooted in the ground,
That leaf and blossom stinted not to yield,
Though round its trunk there rose an icy mound,
And over every twig an icy shield,
  And snowflakes round it made the morning dim,
  Fast falling over trunk and leaf and limb.

Her seemed she must from off this wonder-thorn
Break to herself a branch, and bear away;
There might no better thing than this be borne
From meadow than this heaven-protected may,
That, in such plight as other trees were lorn,
Burgeoned and blossomed, green and sweet and gay,
  Although it stood cut off from everything,
  In winter of its own, in middle spring.

So reached she forth to break a branch or twain,
But all the snow came down in thicker shower,
And blinded her—then brave she reached again,
Yet might not pluck; the bush began to tower
And swing above her height, that all in vain
She reached to rob the mystical white flower,
Crying in anger and in grief amain
For any aid—to pluck she was so fain.

Then saw she how, close-wrapped in mantle red,
A shadow came and stood beside the tree,
Drawing the mantle close about his head
So that his hidden face she might not see;
The snow stayed, and the hawthorn blossom bled
Kissed by the rising sun, and, reaching, he
Broke off a bough and gave her, and undid
His cloak, and kissed her, and his face was hid.

But she leapt forward, laughing, for her lord
She knew at that unveiling, and 'gan pray
That he would go with her in sweet accord,
And they two would together bring in May;
But that red shadow shuddered at her word,
And passed, and she awoke, and waking lay

In bed, and knew a face that bent above,
The likeness of her first wild Cornish love.

Sprang up, and flung her white arms round his throat,
With dainty fingers weaving up his hair,
While old love names, long gotten off by rote
With speaking to herself to ease her care,
She murmured—like a sleepy pigeon's note,
Or drowsy bee's hum that in cowslip lair
Lies hidden, was her voice, as half-awake
Love's thirst upon his lips she sought to slake.

But he with vacant and wide-open eyes
Gazed on her speechless, and gave back no kiss,
Then maiden-like she busied her to rise,
In her white hands she took the brown of his.
"Oh love," she said, "in this our enterprise
With overmuch thy toil is bought my bliss;
Seekest thou hard-won rest or sheltering?
New conquered, or by right of battle king?"

Then answered he,—but like a distant voice
That faints in cavern-windings, vapour-slain,

His voice was hollow, slow as if in choice
Of fitting words, and pitched to one dull strain,
That could not summon tears, nor say "Rejoice!"
Meantime in every pause a low refrain
Chimed in with muffled changes, whence the caves
Sonorous rang to stroke of broaching waves.

"No conqueror," he said, "to thee I come,
But vanquished, yet I come as conquering;
Scourged at the 'hest of fate with whip of doom,
A slave I flee, yet march I as a king,
Tyrant of mine own angel, who his home
Now weeping seeks, to shun me; lo! a thing
To boast me of, that I the heavens sway
And only bend to fate, whom gods obey.

"Wouldst thou this riddle read?" But she replied,
"I seek not unto riddles, but thy will:
Show what thou wilt, and what thou willest hide!"
Then he, "A dark speech learnt I on the hill:
And dark and winding are the ways that guide
The feet that seek Tintagel—dark and chill
Is that deep yawning ditch—this still dim room
Were chill but for thine eyes that banish gloom!"

She seeing in his eyes the wandering light
Flash suddenly, and hearing how his words
Grew tremulous, in pity of her knight
As one distraught with watching, loosed the cords
That bound his mantle, whispering delight,
And loosed his armour hacked by many swords,
  And clasped his neck, and kissed him, and they lay
  In silence kissing as came in the day.

At the first Angelus a knocking came
Without, low, slow, and steady, never ceasing,
Which hearing, softly kissing of his dame
That slept, and from her hands his neck releasing,
Up Uther rose, with hands that shook for shame,
To gird himself to flight, and as, increasing
  In haste though not in sound, the blows rained on,
  He watched her and made speed his gear to don.

Swiftly and stealthily he crossed the floor,
With careful hand undid the tell-tale latch,
To feel one grip his wrist, and press, no more,
Who drew him forth, yet turned he once to snatch
A last look of his lady, but full sore
His master urged him on; the sleeping watch

Saw not the sage and youth that fled away,
Unquestioned, towards the charm-dispelling day.

At undern in a chamber towards the east
The lady of Tintagel sat alone
Within her oriel; one pane released
Let in the light wind from the mountains blown
To lift her hair's dark veil, and show the breast
That throbbed half-hidden by her careless gown,
With hands crossed listlessly in idle lap
She mused upon that morning's pleasant hap.

A little sad—because her cherished mate
Had found her sleeping when he turned to part:
Exceeding glad—because her heart elate
Whispered, "I am the half of that great heart
That in this hall and by Dimilioc's gate,
Divided but not severed, since the dart
That pierces half quells all, beats equally,
Answering from shore to down, from hill to sea."

Blue eyes and bright, grow senseless grey for weeping!
Bleed little hands, self-torn in clenched despair!

Time cometh fast with sorrow in his keeping!
Fall down and shroud her, dark funereal hair!
Shroud her, the late-sown tares are ripe for reaping,
But the good grain grows slowly; now with care
  Red-russet cheek and ripe grow wan and pale,
  And thou sweet voice, low-laughing, learn to wail!

From out the hidden bosom of the hills
There came an echo of her labouring heart,
A measured steady pulsing, such as fills
His ear who, sweating, doth from pallet start
To count the dismal tick presaging ills,
Which, striking drowsy sense, became a part
  Of that love fancy in her waking dream,
  And as at love's low voice her eyes 'gan gleam.

And, louder growing, to her heart's light bounding
The echo answered, till the sound drew out
From that dim world of dreams her soul surrounding
And grew into her life—for, past a doubt,
Upon the western road are hoofs resounding,
There comes a rider who with spur and shout
  Urges his weary beast, that on the rise
  Flounders, and struggles up, and floundering dies.

Plucked from her Paradise by earthly hand
She rose, with weird foreshadowing of mishap,
And leaning forth saw one of Gorlois' band
With jerkin hacked and torn, and battered cap,
Midst of an eager crowd his face that scanned;
Like one new-smitten at the thunder clap
She tossed her clutching hands above her head
With but one word, a short harsh cry of 'Dead!'

Flung down before the dead and dying's stay,
A moment gazing on that fainting Face
That blesses from the curse, a moment lay
This woful dame, then with a hasty grace
She swept her robes around and fled away
To seek her maidens, crying, "Give him place,
Who seeks me from the Duke!" and when they stared,
She only cried, "Place, place!" and forth she fared

Unto the gate, and all men falling back
She gripped the messenger, and said, "What hour?"
Whereat he fell a-weeping, and "Alack!"
He said, "sweet lady, seek thine inmost bower
Before I tell my tale." Then she, "Not slack
Rides evil fate; fast falls the thunder-shower!

When died the duke, and how? art thou alone
Left of that guard to whom his heart was shown?"

Then spake the messenger, "When heaven's fire
Lit funeral torches for the night nigh dead,
Uprose the duke; the foe he said must tire
With watching of our keep, and, prone in bed,
Would never dream that mortals might aspire
To match the war of gods; and forth he led
His men, and scared the foe, and fired their camp,
And led us back behind the castle ramp.

And standing at the gate, till all passed in
To be in safety, there came forth a dart
From those who fled; he only might not win
The safety that he gave, he lies apart
Asleep in armour, quiet 'mid the din
Of clamorous lament, and I—my start
Was instant, I have pricked, turn not thy face,
If I too long have lived, death voids disgrace."

With that he half-undid his vest, and showed
His death, and smiled, and fell before her feet;

Whereat into her face the sudden blood
Rushed, and she knelt, and with her mouth so sweet
She pressed his mouth, and said, "Thou servant good,
Take thou this kiss, thy lord and mine to greet!
Come in," she said, "my girls; this early air
Is something cold, methinks: scant weed I wear."

So sought she shelter where close locked from sight
She paced the floor to think. "Ah! wretch," she said,
"Poor purblind heart, what power in marriage rite
To save from lies, thou being thus misled,
And giving no alarm when churl for knight
By glamour crept into my very bed!
Shall not the minstrels in their mocking rhyme
Sing me as light o' love through dateless time?

"Yet though my deed be vile, High God I take
To witness how, poor heart, thou wast most pure!
And that shall men allow, for thou must break,
Yea, break, that I may pass, and not endure
Until they judge me to the harlot's stake,
And he will greet me lovingly for sure,
And own me guiltless, when I lay my head
Beside his feet, such wisdom have the dead!

"And I shall die—alas for my fair fame!
I was full true, but all the gaping crowd
Will joy to name me false, and cry my shame;
What now they mutter will be cried aloud!
Igerna, will they call me, the lewd dame
Who kissed before her lord was lapt in shroud,
And maids will shun my grave for fear my sprite
Should cross their path, and give their love a blight."

Thus mourned she till the night, when evening skies
Were mocked by glimmer of a thousand lights
That crosssed the hills, where borne in victor-wise
Came Gorlois on his shield, upborne of knights;
Tintagel rang with solemn obsèquies,
As safe they housed him with all fitting rites
Where waited all his fathers, sheathed in mail,
To greet their last great son, who filled the tale.

Yet none accused her, and the days went on,
And weeks grew months, and yet they spoke her fair;
Until she gathered courage, seeing none
Askance looked on her, and began to dare
The face of men again; the demon's son,
Who wrought her woe, had done his busy care

To cozen so their senses in the keep
That no man knew of that sad morning's sleep.

And slowly took she comfort, till each lord
That waited on the king, and served his will,
Said, "It were well O king, shouldst thou accord
With yon fair lady mourning on her hill;
This were a weapon salve for bite of sword
If ye were wed;" and many urged her still.
He sought her, and she bowed to his behest,
And bore him Arthur, and the land had rest.

L'Envoi.

Not every man that fareth forth to find
That lost Atlantis where is perfect bliss
Hath gained the rest; no man of mortal kind
Hath sent back word how great his quiet is:
Perchance their posts have much ado to find
This earth by tear-mists hidden—yet I wis
Some have fulfilled their will and won the quest,
The lone and sun-steeped Island of the Blest.

One setteth sail into a golden haze
At morning, and at noontide still goes on

Beneath the bitter glory of those rays,
Across the mocking path that flees the sun,
Until at eve he sees where all ablaze
The western turrets rise, and deems them won,
  Spreads arms, and tries to shout—from under shades
  Up floats grey night and El Dorado fades.

One hoists his sail unto the westering wind
That sweeps him onward through a glittering morn,
Leaving the happy, homely earth behind,
To seek Utopia, and, fancy-borne,
Follows the far horizon ever lined
With fleeting cliffs, till old and sad and worn
  He beaches duller shore than that he left,
  Or wiser, homeward turns, of dreams bereft.

And one, sad-eyed, in mist and sweeping rain
Goes forth to buffet with a heading wind,
Until he sinks despairing, hunger-slain,
Or, helm in hand, by storm-bolt stricken blind
Unconquered falls,—then under covert lain
Awakes wave-wafted, flower-couched rest to find,
  Sees rosy peaks that tower above his rest,
  And knows Atlantis won, the Island Blest.

For me, in such a sort of weeping morn
As bodeth storm I start, and all the cope
A western rainbow spans, the waves are torn
By sudden gusts, dim grows each eastern slope:
Come, wind and wave, with strength for the sea-born!
Hang out thy colours, oracle of hope!
Ye lawns, still lap the swains in laggard ease!
West for the isles! fresh blows the fostering breeze!

THE END

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LIFE AND SOCIETY IN AMERICA.

SECOND EDITION.

By SAMUEL PHILLIPS DAY, Author of "Down South," "English America, or Pictures of Canadian Places and Peoples," etc.

To be had at all Libraries.

A Second Series will be ready in June.

"We are indebted to Mr. Day for a most readable and entertaining collection of sketches of transatlantic life, drawn by one who is not only a keen observer of men and manners, but who is also evidently gifted with a shrewd and penetrating insight into human nature. Our author, starting from Queenstown in one of the magnificent 'National' steamers, is landed within ten days at New York. The impression made upon him by the 'Empire City' does not appear to have been a favourable one. It must be remembered that the 'Manhattanese' are a very composite and cosmopolitan population, entirely engaged in commercial pursuits, from whom it would not be fair to expect the culture and refinement observable in such centres of political and literary activity as either Washington or Boston. Liverpool is not a fair sample of English life and manners; no more is New York of American. Mr. Day, who gives us a very full and exhaustive account of all the social surroundings of the 'Empire City,' with its huge Babel-like hotels, its swarm of restaurants and eating-houses, necessary to a people who live out of their own homes, and its varied modes of locomotion, likens this huge hive to 'a combination of London, Berlin, and Paris.' The city is laid out in parallelograms, and the streets are numerically named. The practice—widely prevalent—of hanging out clothes to dry on the house-tops must be sadly detrimental to the appearance of respectable neighbourhoods. Our author found that the city, generally speaking, is ill kept and worse governed. Still immense improvements have been made during the last thirty years in the police administration. We have been assured by a friend whose recollections of the city extend back to a period when the present generation were yet in the cradle, that in those days the 'rowdies,' as the promiscuous and rampant rascaldom of New York was termed, compelled respectable and peaceable citizens to take a revolver with them when they left home for business in the morning, as regularly as they put on their great-coats when the thermometer failed to register a certain temperature.

"*On a changé tout cela*—the police of to-day are both energetic and efficient, and the 'firing free' of years ago is now happily confined to low drinking saloons and gambling hells. No one acquainted with the New York of to-day will, however, deny the justice of Mr. Day's strictures so far as they relate to the scandalous and open facilities for immorality afforded by the 'demoralising haunts' infesting the city in the shape of the 'cellars,' where dancing and drinking go on until early in the morning, the ministering Hebes being 'gaudily attired females of notoriously loose character.' Immorality in this city is certainly unblushingly open, and does not seem to trouble itself about that decent screen which legislative action as well as public opinion has compelled it to shelter itself with in this country. In this sphere of activity there is certainly a wide field open to the philanthropic labours of a 'social purity alliance.' New York, like all other great commercial centres, possesses a certain 'shoddy aristocracy'—to use a popular term—the mushroom outcome of successful speculation, and this aristocracy, knowing nothing better than fine houses, well-appointed carriages, and blazing jewels—the goal of its efforts—naturally delights in magnificent display. Hence in this city of the great Republic may be observed the strange spectacle of crested carriages and gorgeous footmen. As might be expected, the fairer portion of the inhabitants of the Fifth Avenue are not less addicted to gay dressing and sumptuous jewellery than their lords are to four-in-

hands and yachts that might excite the envy of a king. According to Mr. Day, 'a middle-class family in this country could live well upon the sum necessary to rig an American *belle* efficiently.' This, be it understood, does not include jewellery, of which our Manhattanese cousins seem to be inordinately fond. Indeed, our author assures us that 'no New York woman, be she dame or spinster, considers herself properly "adjusted," save when she has got half-a-dozen diamond rings sparkling on her tiny tapering fingers.' He adds, 'I am acquainted with a literary childless lady, whose husband every year invariably presents her with a pledge of love in the form of a diamond ring.'

"The excessive freedom from old-world social restraints characteristic of New York life seems to have jarred upon the nerves of Mr. Day. Not the least shocking to our way of thinking, among the social anomalies that owe their existence to this freedom of manners, is the custom so prevalent in some of the large and more go-ahead cities of the Union of courtship by advertisement. A gentleman travelling by steamboat or tram-car in New York sees a lady to whom he is an entire stranger, but with whose appearance he is prepossessed. The total want of acquaintance with the object of his adoration is no obstacle to his courtship, and with the most perfectly honourable intentions he hurries to his office or to his home, and pens such an advertisement as the following, selected by Mr. Day from the *New York Herald*:—

"BROADWAY.—*Tuesday Afternoon.*—Young lady, short, flowing hair, please grant an interview to young gentleman who crossed at Duane Street. Address, M. B., Box 4,678, Post Office.

"Here is another gem from the 'personal' column:—

"THE GENTLEMAN who unfortunately *dropped* the young lady while assisting her in crossing Grand Street on Sunday night, desires her acquaintance. Address, F., 32, Grand Street.

"Our transatlantic cousins are notoriously fond of being lectured to. Of course a reputation for brilliancy on the platform is not gained in a day, any more than it is in any other walk of life, and it seems, according to the highest possible authority on transatlantic lecturing—*The Literary Bureau*—that, 'next to merit, nothing so assists a lecturer's success as *printer's ink*.' Acting on this principle, the *Bureau* devotes pages of its publication to advertisements, in the shape of articles from the pens of popular authors spreading abroad the special merits of its clients. Judging from the specimens given by Mr. Day, there is a vigour in these puffs peculiar to Yankee journalists, and never approached by their brethren of the pen on this side of the Atlantic. Take the following specimen, culled by our author from an article in *The Literary Magazine*, descriptive of the brilliant wit and striking delivery peculiar to a certain George Francis Train. Why, as an advertisement it would be well worth five dollars a line, did ink flow less readily from transatlantic quills. Speaking of the lecturer's manner his critic says: 'He slaps his thighs till the noise resounds throughout the length and breadth of the hall. He drags himself almost on all-fours from corner to corner, then knuckles himself, so to speak, back to the reading-desk, which he falls upon as if he would shiver it in pieces and then eat them. He double-shuffles and stamps on the floor till the uprising dust obscures him; he beats his breast, clenches his fist, clutches his hair, plays ball with the furniture, outhowls the roaring elements, streams with perspiration, foams at the mouth, paces up and down till he looks like a lion in a cage lashing his tail. . . . And such a mimic is he, that when he placed a chair in the centre of the platform, and kept trotting around it to show how certain old fogies revolve in the same everlasting orbit, he actually resembled a dog trying to make time against his disappearing tail.'

"It is natural that in a land where the art, or rather science, of advertising has been carried to so extraordinary a pitch of perfection, peculiar privileges should fall to the lot of those whose calling gives them in a pre-eminent degree the use of that highly prized instrument—the trumpet of fame. Hence America has not inappropriately been termed the 'Paradise of Editors.' For some highly piquant details on the subject we will refer our readers to Mr. Day's chapter. It must not be supposed that our author has confined his observations on American life to these brilliant sketches of men and manners in the 'Empire City.' In his agreeable company we have the privilege of visiting the 'city of brotherly love,' as he terms Philadelphia

the capital of Pennsylvania, and the second city of the United States as regards population; the 'gay capital,' as the Americans delight to call Washington, the seat of government; and the 'hub of the universe,' as scholarly Boston, the home of authors and blue stockings, has been nicknamed. For Mr. Day's impressions of these respectively representative centres of transatlantic life and culture we must refer our readers to his bright and animated pages, of the spirit of which, at once genial and candid, we trust this review has given them some idea, however necessarily inadequate."—*Social Notes.*

"Such an interesting and amusing book is sure to find plenty of readers. Nor will any one who takes it up lay it down without profit as well as pleasure. It tells us about hotels and boarding-houses—those banes of family life—about popular preachers, and mediums, and free love, and tippling; besides taking us to Boston, and Washington, and Utah, and Philadelphia. Mr. Day by no means flatters the Americans; doubtless he thinks, with Dickens, that, having started on such high principles, they are bound to keep well above the European level. The New York tram-cars, if cheap, are nasty. On trance mediums and others of the Sludge genus it is impossible to be too hard; Mr. Day does not spare them. Nor is he pleased with the popular preachers. Dr. Ward Beecher's sermon he finds shocking in delivery, and below mediocrity in subject-matter and arrangement, although enlivened with sentences like this: 'Some say lawyers can't go to heaven. It's a lie. Some say merchants can't go to heaven. It's a lie!' each sentence being emphasized with a violent stamp of the foot. There are some surprises in the book. We know the Americans are etiquettish, but we could not have imagined Emerson declining an invitation to dinner because he had no dress coat with him. Mormon women, we had often heard, are ugly; but that a 'porter-house steak' costs 5s., and that New York meat is not only very inferior, but very badly cooked, was news to us. American editors have wonderful privileges; in many places they get their food and clothing gratis, in return for 'personal' articles. The book ought to be studied by all who want to see the shadows as well as the lights of American society."—*Graphic.*

"This is a work of uncommon merit. It is an exhaustive picture of life in the United States, which we can recommend to all persons who are interested in the social life of the Great Republic. The book contains twenty chapters, which treat of a great variety of subjects, such as 'The Cost of Living,' 'The Paradise of Editors,' 'The Gay Capital,' 'Marriage Made Easy,' 'The Empire City,' etc., all practical, instructive, and interesting. We can commend the book as spiritedly written and containing much interesting information"—*Galignani's Messenger.*

"So much interest is now manifested concerning the domestic manners and 'society' of our first cousins across the Atlantic, that this volume is sure to find many eager readers, who will discover in it much of interest and value. Mr. Samuel Phillips Day is by no means an unknown writer, several of his books on American society having been exceedingly successful. He has lived a long time in the United States, principally in New York, and as he is possessed of a great deal of natural quickness of observation he is generally very amusing and trustworthy. His description of New York is unfavourable. 'The felicity of domestic life, as we in England understand it, is almost unknown in this "go-ahead" centre of commerce. The people live much out of doors, not relishing the tame monotony and dull stillness of home. There are special red-letter days, it is true, in their calendar, when social gatherings occur, but these are not so numerous as they were a few years ago. The nominal heads of families, when their day's work is done, betake themselves to their comfortable clubs, where they read the papers, "liquor," and indulge in games of hazard. Materfamilias receives her special visitors at home, and so do the female "olive branches" when they have reached the age of womanhood. Each has her familiar male friend or suitor. Indeed, it is not uncommon for a gentleman to have visited an American family many times, and yet never to have seen the parents of the young lady or ladies deputed to receive him.' This is a fact, but at the same time it must be remembered that it is rather a rule with the 'shoddy' than with the families of older respectability. Mr. Day is quite right when he describes the genuine New York 'shoddy' as the vulgarest creature on earth, and it is he and his brothers and sisters who give the Americans such evil repute abroad. Fast, ignorant, flashy, and brutal, the men of

this order and type are simply insufferable. The women are a little better, but often w ld and prof un ly corrupt. . . . Mr. Day gives a very agreeable account of Mr. Longfellow's residence. . . . The chapters on hotels and boarding-houses are well done, and accurate enough to be of value to tourists and others intending to visit America."—*Morning Post.*

"This is not merely a very interesting book, but one which has a special value, inasmuch as it is the work of a writer who is thoroughly acquainted with his subject. He has obviously lived in various parts of the States for considerable periods, and he clearly knows enough of society to generalize with tolerable accuracy. It need hardly be said that his opinions are not invariably flattering, and that some of his judgments are likely to give no little offence. Mr. Day finds that American girls are cold and calculating. 'They will drink champagne with you, crack jokes with you, gossip with you, smoke cigarettes with you, nay, even flirt a bit with you; but they will not marry you, save upon the cold, careful consideration of how you stand with your banker.' We have heard very often that there are no hotels like those of New York, and the English hotels are only tolerable as they resemble them. Mr. Day tells us that they are anything but desirable residences; huge and unsightly in appearance, destitute of many arrangements for comfort which Englishmen consider a matter of necessity; noisy, bustling, and generally unpleasant places to inhabit. Nor is Mr. Day much more favourably impressed with American religion. From time to time certain 'evangelists' have been kind enough to visit this country in hope of 'converting' the unenlightened Britisher, and relieving him of a little of his superfluous cash; but it would seem that there is quite sufficient work for them at home, and that the English clergy have very little to learn from their American brethren. If Americans fall short in religious matters, however, they make up in the amount of their superstition. Astrologers and clairvoyants innumerable advertise their pretended gifts in the daily papers, and magnetism and spiritualism count their dupes by thousands. On the vexed question of drink Mr. Day speaks with weight. The over-restrictive legislation which some well-meaning people are anxious to see introduced into this country, in imitation of the States, he pronounces to be a conspicuous failure. 'It has more extensively introduced the rum jug into the family circle. Old and reliable physicians throughout the States now report a fourfold increase in cases of delirium tremens. To-day a man with four inches of Maine whisky in him is not less dangerous than a wild beast.' These are striking words, and Mr. Day has done well to quote them and to comment upon them as he has done. There, however, we must leave his book. Enough has probably been said to show that the work thoroughly deserves the character given to it at the outset, inasmuch as it deals with a great variety of topics, and treats of all with knowledge, common sense, and sound judgment. The present volume is described as the first series; few readers will put it down without wishing for the second."—*Morning Advertiser.*

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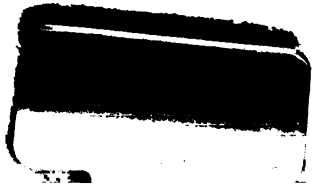
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